JANUARY
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Adventure

71

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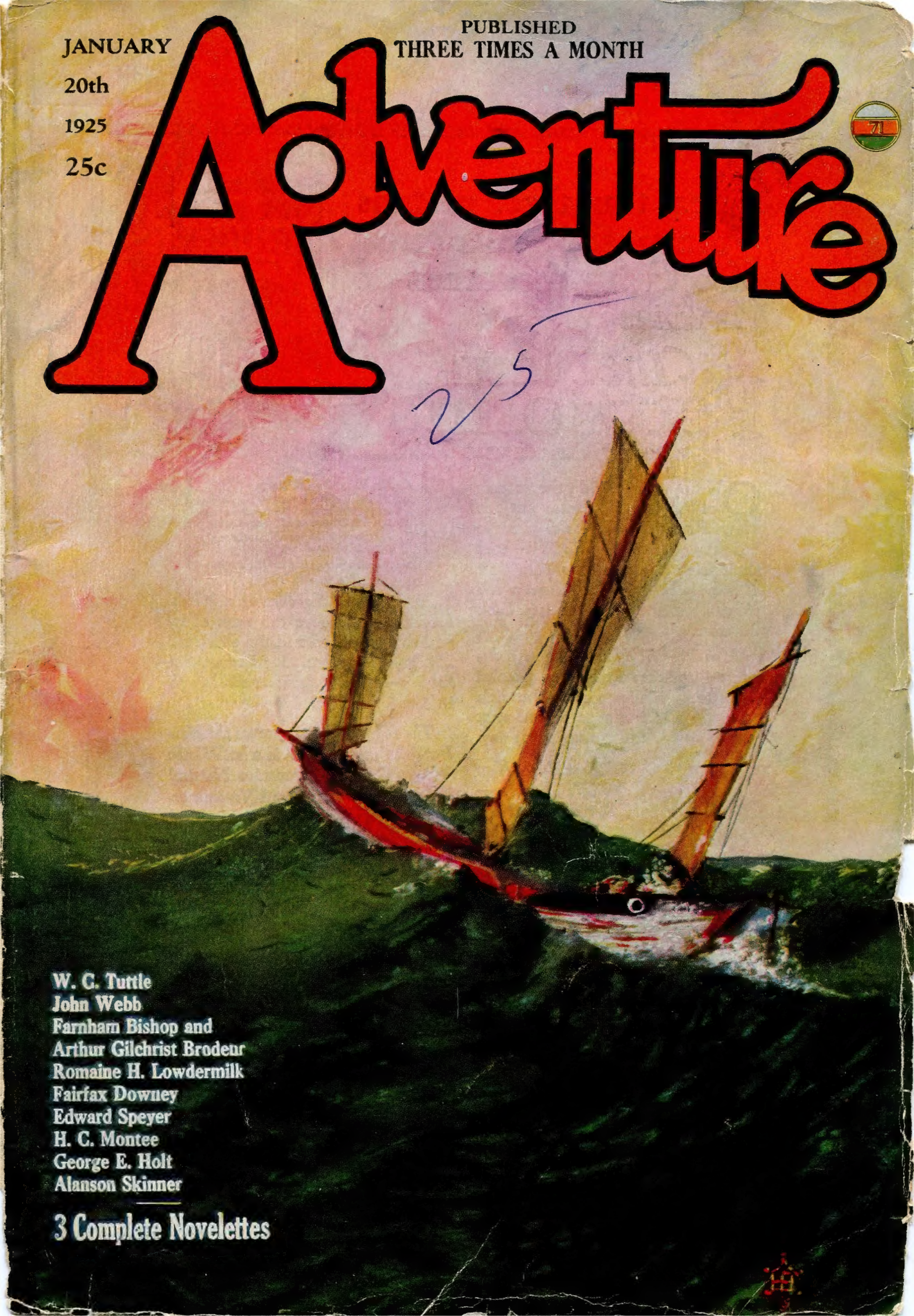

W. C. Tuttle
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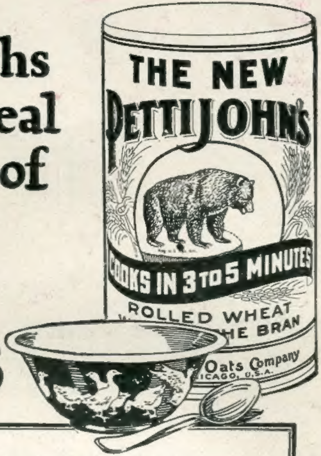
Farnham Bishop and
Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur
Romaine H. Lowdermilk
Fairfax Downey
Edward Speyer
H. C. Montee
George E. Holt
Alanson Skinner

3 Complete Novelettes

In less than three months —the most popular cereal food with thousands of families

The New Pettijohn's

WHOLE WHEAT CEREAL

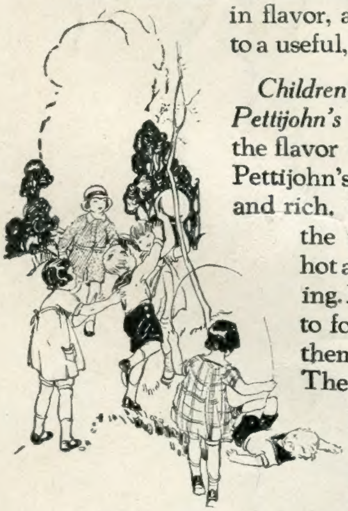


1. Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes.
2. The pick of America's Wheat—contains 25% Natural Bran, with essential Vitamines and Mineral Salts.
3. A new and delicious Flavor brought out by pre-cooking.

ON September 15th, the grocers of the United States put the New Pettijohn's on sale. People bought it—tasted it—liked it—told their friends about this *New Hot Whole Wheat Cereal.* And week after week they are coming back for *more.*

Men like the New Pettijohn's because—it makes a generous, grateful *hot* breakfast, delicate in taste but rich in flavor, a good start to a useful, happy day.

Children like the New Pettijohn's because—the flavor of the New Pettijohn's is mellow and rich. It comes to the table fresh, hot and appetizing. Nobody has to force Bran on them nowadays. The New Pettijohn's contains 25% of Natural Bran.



Mother likes the New Pettijohn's because—she enjoys the taste of it, and so do the men and the children. It is *good* for them. It is *convenient* for her—cooked *through* and *through* in 3 to 5 minutes.

The Food Expert approves the New Pettijohn's because—it is a *hot* Whole Wheat Cereal. It contains Natural Bran, Mineral Salts and Vitamines. It is one of the most nourishing and appetizing foods you can put on your table.

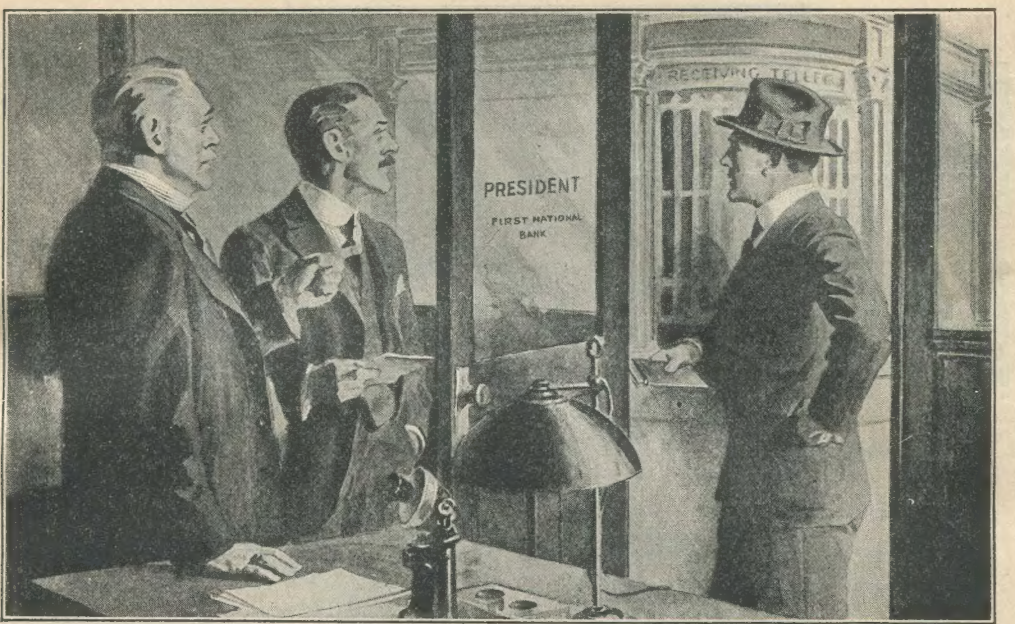
The Grocer approves the New Pettijohn's because—he knows that a good *hot* Whole Wheat Cereal, *convenient to serve*—will be welcomed by his customers. It doesn't surprise him at all to see customers come back week after week for more of the New Pettijohn's.

TRY IT—TASTE IT—
TELL YOUR FRIENDS

At your Grocer's—a Generous Package.

The Quaker Oats Company

CHICAGO, U.S.A.



"He Deposits $500 a Month!"

"SEE that man at the Receiving Teller's window? That's Billy King, Sales Manager for the Browning Company. First of every month he comes in and deposits $500. I've been watching Billy for a long time—take almost as much interest in him as I do in my own boy.

"Three years ago he started in at Browning's as a clerk at $15 a week. Married, had one child, couldn't save a cent. One day he came in here desperate—wanted to borrow a hundred dollars—wife was sick.

"I said, 'Billy, I'm going to give you something worth more than a loan—some good advice—and if you'll follow it I'll let you have the hundred, too. You don't want to be a $15 clerk all your life, do you?' Of course he didn't. 'Well,' I said, 'there's a way to climb out of your job to something better. Take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools in the work you like best and want to advance in, and put in some of your evenings getting special training. The Schools will do wonders for you—we've got several I. C. S. boys right here in the bank.'

"That night Billy wrote to Scranton and a few days later he had started a course in Salesmanship. It had a fascination for him and in a little while he got his chance on the city sales force. Why, in three months he had doubled his salary! Next thing I knew he was put in charge of a branch office up state.

"Then he took the I. C. S. Advertising course. Well, he made such a record up there that a few months ago they brought him back and made him Sales Manager—on salary and commission. He's making real money now. Owns his own home, has bought some good securities, and he's a regular at that window every month. It shows what a man can do in a little spare time."

Employers are begging for men with ambition, men who really want to get ahead in the world and are willing to prove it by training themselves to do some one thing well.

Prove that *you* are that kind of a man! The International Correspondence Schools are ready and anxious to help you prepare for the position you want in the work you like best.

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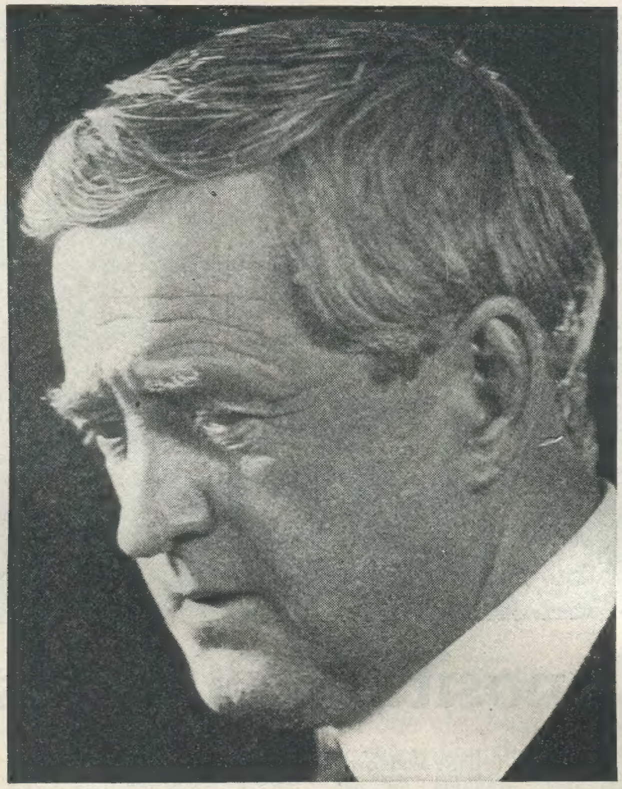
ADVENTURE
Jan. 20th, 1925

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 50
Number 5



It set him thinking

HERE, right in the prime of his business career, he had fumbled the biggest deal he ever had undertaken. It was the great disappointment of his life. And now he was putting himself through a rigorous self-examination, trying to fathom the reason for his failure.

Just then he stumbled across a peculiarly frank magazine advertisement that seemed to hint at the possible reason. It made him do some hard thinking.

* * * *

That's the insidious thing about halitosis (unpleasant breath). You, yourself, rarely know when you have it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A New Serial, One Complete Novel and One Complete Novelette

THEIR search for the fabled white Indians of Venezuela took them up the Rio Ventuari. All went well until the Governor of San Fernando asked them for their motor launch, as a gift. "MOUNTAINS OF MYSTERY," a four-part story by Arthur O. Friel, begins in the next issue.

FOUR nations use force and guile to obtain a rich mining concession in Morocco, with an American and *Mohamed Ali* playing the leading parts. "THE HAND OF ALLAH," a novel by George E. Holt, complete in the next issue.

HE DROVE his airplane through a blizzard above Lake Michigan and landed on a desolate strip of ground close to a snowbound house. He needed food and warmth, but the inmates drove him off with bullets. "A FINE MESS," a complete novelette by Thomson Burtis, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

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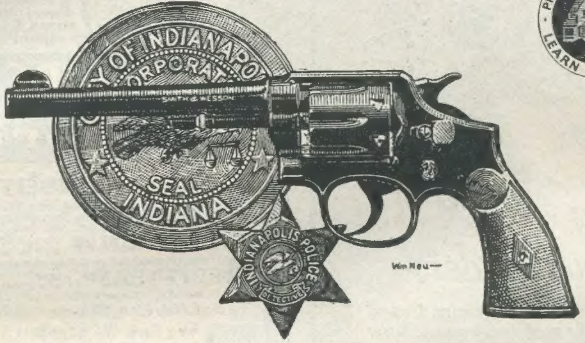
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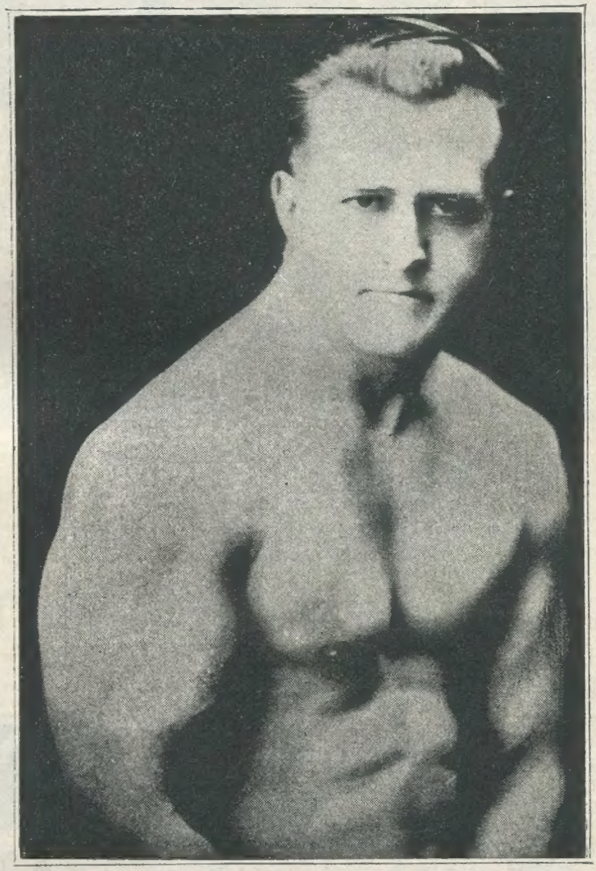

Earle E. Liederman
The Muscle Builder

is the most gruesome commandment handed down to mankind. A man may lie, steal or break any other law and the public will eventually forgive and forget. But let him commit murder and the cry of everybody is to give him the full penalty—*Death!* And what is the common excuse of the murderer? INSANITY! Sure, he's crazy. Any man must be crazy to commit murder.

But how about the fellow who slowly but surely kills his own body by neglect? He's the craziest one of all.

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Today Is Your Day

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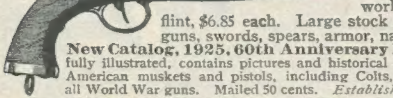

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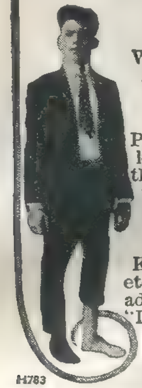

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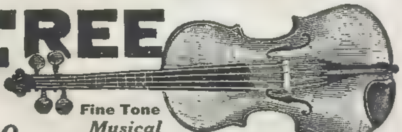

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Adventure

January 20th 1925 Vol. L. No. 5

The Lovable Liar

A Complete Novelette

By W. C. Tuttle

Author of "The Trey of Spades," "The Dead-Line," etc.

TECOMA consisted of a little depot, a saloon and a restaurant. Inasmuch as the saloon and restaurant were in the same building, it made Tecoma a two-house town. The railroad time table showed that Tecoma had an elevation of five thousand feet, and that certain trains would stop there on a flag.

There was a wagon road of sorts from Tecoma down into the Moolock cattle country, and this alleged road also wound its way from Tecoma back to the mines of the Bearpaw district. The main street of Tecoma was this road, if it might be termed a street. In front of the saloon and restaurant was a long hitch-rack, where a horse might have the privilege of standing at an angle of about forty-five degrees.

Just now it was after dark. The restaurant was closed, as was the depot; but from the open saloon door a shaft of yellow light illuminated part of the rough porch. Inside the saloon, five men sat at a poker table, playing rather indifferently. The stakes were not high enough to make it interesting for a tall, raw-boned cowboy, who yawned wearily and shoved back from the table.

"I wish there was a hotel here," he said. "Ain't even a stable where yuh can feed a horse."

"And that's whatever," agreed the proprietor. "Tecoma ain't no town, pardner. 'F I had a bed I'd offer it to you and your pardner; but all I've got is a cot t' sleep on."

"It's about twenty miles to Moolock,"

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offered the man who owned the restaurant. "The road ain't none too good, but yuh can get a bed in Moolock."

The tall cowboy yawned again and squinted at his partner, "Sleepy" Stevens. Sleepy was slightly below the average in height, with broad shoulders, slightly bowed legs and a pair of perfectly innocent blue eyes. His face was angular, almost serious in repose, but at the slightest provocation it would break into a mass of grin-wrinkles, like the ripples from a stone cast into a quiet pool.

"What do yuh think about it, Sleepy?" asked "Hashknife" Hartley, the tall one. "Shall we gird up our broncs and hie away for this Moolock town?"

"Jist so well as not, I reckon," said Sleepy. "Might as well be ridin' as settin' here. I ain't held better than a pair of jacks since supper."

"You fellers come in from the Bearpaw?" asked the saloon man.

"Yeah," said Hashknife. "We came in over the Grayling trail. Some darned liar told us that there was a lot of unlocated land up there—land that was pretty rich; but he lied, as usual. What kind of a country is this Moolock?"

"Cows, mostly. Lot of good outfits. Frank Allenby owns the Half-Circle Cross, the biggest outfit."

Hashknife looked curiously at Sleepy, who regarded him innocently. They cashed in their few chips, bought a supply of tobacco from the saloon keeper, and went out to the hitch-rack.

As they started to untie their horses, Sleepy grunted wonderingly. He had ridden a roan horse into Tecoma, but the horse he was looking at now was decidedly gray. It's head was hanging low with fatigue and its coat was drying rough with lather.

He called softly to Hashknife, who was doing a little swearing over his own discovery.

"I've got a pinto," grunted Hashknife, as Sleepy blurted out the fact that he had drawn a gray.

There were only two horses at the rack, and only one rack in the town. Sleepy scratched a match and discovered that whoever had made the substitution had changed saddles too.

"We've still got our saddles," he declared. "Now what in —— do yuh know about that?"

Hashknife untied his pinto and led it into the light from the saloon door, where he appraised the animal closely. It was sore-footed and weary. Sleepy walked in beside him, leading the gray, and was about to call to those inside the saloon to come out and help them wonder over it all, when a voice yelled out from the darkness—

"Put up yore hands, doggone yuh!"

A revolver flashed and the bullet bit a splinter out of the sidewalk. With an almost automatic movement, Hashknife drew and fired at the flash; and at the same moment he darted out of the light and flung himself flat on the ground. Sleepy went headlong out of the illumination, rolled down the hill and came to rest behind a big rock.

"Gosh dang yuh, what did yuh do that for, 'Forty'?" wailed a voice from the gloom. "Who in —— told yuh to shoot, anyway?"

"Don't walk into that light, 'Swan River'!" cautioned another voice. "They didn't go far. I've got to fix that gun of mine. It's too easy on the pull. Don't git in that light, you darned fool!"

The three men had come to the saloon door, wondering aloud what it was all about. The saloon keeper carried a sawed-off shotgun, and at sight of him, the one called Swan River spoke quickly—

"Hey, Pierson! This is the sheriff."

"Hello, Swan River," called the saloon keeper. "What's all the ruction about?"

"Don't git in that light!" warned the deputy, "Forty Dollar" Dion, whose gun was easy on the trigger. "I tell yuh they didn't git far away."

"Who yuh lookin' for?" asked one of the men in the saloon doorway.

"The men who own them two horses," replied Swan River Smith, the sheriff. "They stuck up a train this afternoon, and we've been on their trail ever since. That's their gray and pinto."

"Hey, sheriff!" called Hashknife.

"Listenin'."

"Then listen close. Them ain't our horses. I reckon the three men in the doorway can tell yuh that we rode a roan and a bay into this place late this afternoon, and that we've been in there ever since. We jist found that somebody traded horses with us, and was admirin' 'em in the light."

"That's the truth," said the saloon keeper. "They sure did ride a roan and a bay, sheriff."

"Well—" the sheriff seemed a bit dubious—"if yuh say so, Pierson, I'll take yore word. C'mon in, gents."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy sauntered back into the light and looked at Swan River Smith and his elongated deputy. Swan River was small, gray as a rabbit, and with a pair of eyes as hard as granite. Forty Dollar Dion was almost as tall as Hashknife, sad of face, and walked with a loose-jointed shamble that would cause one to suspect that he might fall apart at any time.

"I'm the sheriff of this county," said Swan River, after a close scrutiny of the two cowpunchers. "Name's Smith."

Hashknife introduced himself and Sleepy, and they adjourned to the bar.

"You danged near killed me," declared Forty Dollar mournfully. "My gun went off accidental. I had sense enough to sidestep; and yore bullet poked a hole in the air just after I left. And it ain't like me to think fast, either."

"Well," grinned Hashknife, "yuh can't blame me, pardner. One of yuh yelled for us to put up our hands and the other one shot at us."

"Excuse him, if yuh can," said the sheriff, "I can't. Here's happy days and a blanket at night."

They drank and rattled their glasses on the bar.

"Didja take a good look at them horses, Forty?" asked the sheriff.

"Uh-huh. I was right, Swan."

The sheriff accepted Hashknife's tobacco and cigaret papers, which were also passed to Forty Dollar.

"The question is—where did they go from here?" observed the sheriff.

"I'll betcha forty dollars they headed for Bearpaw," said Forty Dollar. "They've got fresh horses now."

"And good horses," added Sleepy mournfully.

"I never heard of a lost horse that wasn't a good one," grinned the sheriff. "Nobody ever lost a bad one. Ha, ha, ha! Well, there ain't no use tryin' to foller them two fellers now. Our horses are plumb whipped; so we might as well go home, I reckon."

"How much did they get?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno. They blew the safe on the express car and took what was in it. Cut the train in two and made their getaway near where they had the horses staked out. But the engineer got a look at the horses they used, and as soon as the train got to Moolock he told me about it. Me and Forty cut straight across the hills and are lucky enough to spot 'em.

"Since then we've sure burnt up horseflesh. Comes night and we kinda loses track of 'em; so we heads for here and finds that pinto and gray, standin' plumb in the light. Yuh can't blame us for the mistake, can yuh?"

Hashknife laughed and shook his head. It was all clear to him now, and he did not blame the sheriff.

"I reckon we'll go to Moolock with yuh," he said. "Mebbe them two horses are as fresh as yours, sheriff."

"Yeah, sure. Let's go. It's a long ride back there; but there ain't no accommodations in Tecoma. You know anybody down there, Hartley?"

"Nope. Me and my pardner rode into Bearpaw from over the Grayling trail. We kinda had an idea we'd like to do some gold minin', and we was told that there was plenty of good ground left up there; but there wasn't an inch. By golly, a moose bird has to keep in the trees to keep from bein' a trespasser."

"Pshaw, that's all been located long ago. Well, let's have one more drink and pull our freight, gents."

They told Tecoma good-bye, mounted the jaded horses and headed for Moolock.

"Seems to me that I've heard of Moolock," observed Hashknife, as they jogged along over the dim road through the pines. "The name is kinda familiar. You spoke of a feller named Allenby."

"Frank Allenby," said the sheriff. "He's the biggest man in Moolock county."

"To hear him tell it," amended Forty Dollar, "Allenby thinks that his family is responsible for the risin' and settin' of the sun. 'S a fact. He tells it when to come up and when to go down."

"Didn't Allenby send some young feller to the pen a while ago?"

"Yeah. A young feller by the name of 'Bud' Bell. Allenby didn't exactly send him to the penitentiary; but he was responsible for it. Bud's out now. I ain't seen him yet. Mebbe he hates me for what I done, but I had to do it. The Bell family are kinda strong on hate.

"Allenby bought the Half-Circle Cross from Henry Christman about three years ago. Allenby is from Philadelphia. Never seen a cow ranch until he hit this country. Hank Bell nested in on what Christman claimed as his own ranch; but Christman didn't own it.

"There was bad blood between Christman and old Hank. Christman tried in every way to oust old Hank. Hank's cows turned up missin'; some of 'em had their throats cut. But old Hank stuck. One day him and Christman met on the street in Moolock and shot it out. Christman got a bullet through one lung and old Hank got his right arm crippled for life.

"It kinda put a crimp into old Hank, as a gun-man; so he spent all his time givin' his son Bud a six-gun education. And Bud was a danged good pupil. Then Christman sold out to Allenby, who tried to oust old Hank, but the old boy had a title to his ranch. It's a sore spot to Allenby, 'cause Hank's place has the best spring in the Moolock range."

"Did they quit killin' off Hank's cattle?" asked Hashknife.

Swan River Smith chuckled audibly.

"Yeah, yuh might say they did. The Bible says somethin' about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Anyway, Allenby got the deadwood on Bud Bell and sent him up for five years; but the law let him out in two years and a few days. Now I reckon Allenby is shakin' in his boots for fear Bud will make him pay for that two years."

"Allenby is rich, ain't he?"

"Yeah, I suppose he is pretty well fixed."

"And I'll tell yuh why," said Forty Dollar. "Allenby is so stingy that he wouldn't pay two bits for a front seat at the Custer battle, if the original actors would come back and play it. It's an honest fact. To my way of thinkin', Allenby is a big jughead, with too much money and a soul so danged thin that it squeaks in the wind like a fiddle string. He wants everybody to know that he's from Philly-del-fee."

"That ain't nothin' agin' him," said the sheriff.

"Not that part," agreed Forty Dollar. "I admire him for gettin' out that place. I've been there——"

"You mean you've heard about it," corrected the sheriff.

Forty Dollar subsided.

"I've heard that men don't value their lives very highly in Moolock," said Hashknife.

"Thasso?" The sheriff seemed surprised.

"Some as cheap as five thousand dollars."

"Cheap?" blurted Forty Dollar. "My ——, I could point out a lot that wouldn't be worth that much per bale. Five thousand! Say, if I was Saint Peter I wouldn't even accept souls from Moolock, unless they came prepaid."

"Forty Dollar is a pessimist," explained the sheriff quickly.

"Yeah and I'm a good democrat. M' folks was Baptists. Tried to make me one, but the water was too cold that winter; and by spring I was all out of the notion."

"I think we'll like Moolock," said Sleepy.

"Everybody does," said Forty Dollar. "I know at least a hundred that couldn't even think of leavin' there."

"Love their little city, eh?"

"No—they're stuck on the little cemetery," chuckled the deputy. "Ha, ha, ha, ha! I'll drink with yuh in Moolock."

They laughed and rode down the last of the steep grades into the valley of the Moolock. The moon had lifted above the timbered slopes of the mountains, bathing the hills and valleys in a blue haze. Far off to the left a light twinkled from a window.

"That's the 27A ranch," said the sheriff. "Joe Bass owns it. Joe's part Nez Percé; quarter-breed, I reckon. Minds his own business. Been here a long time. Ships quite a lot of stock."

"Moolock is the shippin' center, ain't it?" asked Hashknife.

"Most of it goes from there. It's kinda in the center of the valley; so mostly everybody trades there. I was just wonderin' what you meant about human life bein' cheap in Moolock."

"Nothin' much," laughed Hashknife. "I heard that a man—a certain man—only put that much value on his life."

"Well, I dunno," said the sheriff thoughtfully. "I s'pose that some folks feel thataway about money. I'd hate to sell mine for that."

"And yet yuh take a chance every day for so much per month."

"Yeah, that's a fact. You fellers aim to get jobs over here?"

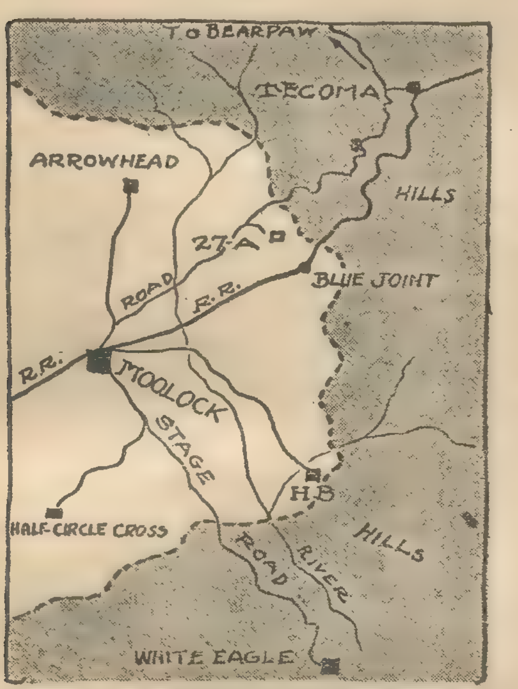
"Mebbe. Feller's got to eat."

"They sure do. Yuh might see Allenby. Jim Merton might need a man. He runs the Arrowhead brand, and his iron is on lots a cows. Them two are the biggest outfits. You'd like Jim. He's young and full of ambition."

"Do yuh think we'd like Allenby?"

"Mm-m-m, well, yuh might. It takes all kinds of folks to make up a world. What's meat for one man is poison for another."

It was about one o'clock in the morning when they rode into the town of Moolock, stabled the horses and got a room at the one little hotel. They were too tired to investigate the town, and even the hard mattress of their bed felt like downy feathers.



"It's funny how things work out," observed Hashknife, as they stretched out in bed. "We never had any idea of runnin' into this place."

"It's the same Allenby, ain't it?" asked Sleepy.

"Sure. Bob Freeman said in his letter that it was Allenby of Moolock; so it must be the same feller. He spoke about the feller that Allenby sent to the penitentiary; and about the old man."

"They are the ones that are stealin' Allenby's cows, eh?" Thus Sleepy, with interest.

"The ones he said he'd pay us five thousand for, if we could convict 'em. If we could." Hashknife laughed. "Allenby wants his detective work done on commision, Sleepy. He's afraid of his life, that's what's the matter with him. And he values it at five thousand."

'Prob'ly all it's worth," laughed Sleepy.

In a different environment Hashknife Hartley might have been a famous detective. His mind was quick to grasp the important points of a case, and that, combined with what a gambler would call a "hunch," had enabled him to solve some of the mysteries of cowland, which had baffled even the best operatives of the Cattle Associations.

Both he and Sleepy Stevens were top-hand cowboys; but fate had always thrown them into troubled ranges where their detective ability was of more demand than their ability to handle cattle. It was a hazardous calling, and of little remuneration.

Their fame had spread from range to range; and the repeated telling in cowtown, bunkhouse and around the camp-fires had exaggerated their ability until they became a bugaboo to those outside the law on the ranges. But there was nothing superhuman about either of them. There was nothing marvelous about their gun-play; neither could they whip their weight in wild-cats. Yet they had left behind them a trail of righted wrongs, and a memory of two big-hearted cowpunchers, who fought with a grin, asking no favors of any one; riding away ahead of thanks or remuneration, if possible.

There were homes on the ranges where these two men were mentioned in the evening prayer, and there were places where their names brought forth a curse and the hope that they would never come back. Still they rode on with a grin on their lips, knowing that fate had marked them for certain duties. And they were both confirmed fatalists—facing death with a grin, because they felt that they would never die until the moving finger on the big book wrote *Finis* after their names.

IT WAS just breaking day the following morning, when "Chet" Hoban, foreman of the Half-Circle Cross, and "Omaha" Olsen, one of the Half-Circle Cross cowboys, rode through the main street of Moolock, which was the only street in the town.

It was a crooked street as well as a narrow one, bordered with false-fronted buildings, of which the livery stable was the most pretentious. The next building in size was the Elk saloon and gambling house, with its spacious hitch-rack crowding close to the narrow sidewalk.

Next to the Elk saloon was the Blue Front Café, with only the name to indicate that at some remote time it might have been painted. Adjoining this building was the White Horse saloon. Across the street from the Elk saloon was the sheriff's office. On this side of the street were more saloons, a general merchandise store, post-office, stage station and other small business necessary to the comfort of rangeland humanity.

The Moolock hotel was neither of great size nor elegant in appointment, but it served. Its sign read—

MOOLOCK HOTEL
FROSTY WELCOME PROP.

Which, as a cowboy had said, "If yuh don't git treated well, you've been warned ahead of time."

But "Frosty" Welcome was only frosty by nickname and not by nature.

The two cowboys rode through town and cut across a flat toward the big loading corrals near the depot. A string of cattle cars were being shunted onto a spur track by a freight engine, as they rode up to the corral fence and tied their horses.

Chet Hoban was a thin-faced, raw-boned man, whose hair was plentifully dusted with gray, and whose humped shoulders and bowed legs gave him the appearance of one who bears a mighty burden on his back. His boot heels were run-over on the outer side, which caused him to walk jerkily lest he sprain his ankles.

Omaha Olsen was taller than Hoban, and even leaner of frame. His eyes were sad; in fact his whole mien bespoke a great sadness, and his long nose, slightly twisted at the bridge, showed blue veins, as though it might be perpetually damp and cold.

The engine uncoupled and went puffing back toward the depot, while Hoban and Olsen crossed the track, circled the corral and stopped. For a space of several moments they surveyed the empty corral and then, as if by mutual consent, they climbed to the wide plank of the top and gazed across the different pens, their faces filled with an expression of wonderment.

Then Hoban circled to the main gate, where he sat down and looked at the broken padlock, which dangled from a twisted staple. Omaha Olsen came up and peered down at it. Then he produced his tobacco and papers and began calmly rolling a cigaret, while Hoban turned and gazed off across the rolling hills.

"They done busted the lock," said Omaha.

Hoban squinted at him, but did not reply. The busted lock needed no explanation.

"Three hundred of 'em, too," observed Omaha.

"You keep on and there won't be nothin' to tell about," said Hoban a trifle sarcastically.

"And Allenby will jist about bust a gizzard." Thus Omaha, ignoring Hoban. "I c'n see him commencin' to git red and swell up like a carbuncle. My ——, this'll sure ache him all over."

"You'd ache if somebody stole three hundred two-year-old Herefords from yuh," retorted Hoban.

"——, I'd ache if I ever had that many. Now what in —— will we do with these cars?"

Hoban got to his feet, shaking his head.

"Let Clayton worry about that. C'mon."

They climbed down and went to their horses, which they mounted and rode back into town. The sheriff was still asleep, but Hoban hammered on the office door and woke him up.

"Last night we had three hundred two-year-old Herefords in the loadin' corrals, sheriff. They were to be loaded this mornin'. Somebody smashed the padlock on the main gate and swiped the whole herd."

Swan River scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Well," he said slowly, "that was worth takin'. Smashed the padlock, eh? That's a penitentiary offense. Took three hundred Half-Circle Cross Herefords, eh? Gosh! Somebody held up the train yesterday, too, Chet. Danged country is goin' to the dogs. Allenby know?"

"Not yet. We just found it out."

"We better find Clayton," said Omaha. "He'll likely want to see about them cars."

"I'll git on some clothes right away and see what I can find out," offered the sheriff, turning back into the office.

Hoban and Omaha walked up to the hotel, where they found Ed Clayton, the cattle-buyer, just ready to leave for the loading pens. Clayton was a big man, without an ounce of fat on his huge frame. He was not unhandsome, dressed well, and was not over thirty-five years of age. Clayton was an inveterate gambler, a plunger; and his eyes were still heavy from a long session of poker at the Elk.

In a few short words Hoban told him what had happened.

"Sounds like a —— fairy story," said Clayton, but quickly corrected himself with, "You know what I mean, Hoban; it don't seem possible."

Hoban relaxed and nodded shortly. He and Clayton had never been very friendly.

"Mebbe it don't sound possible," said Hoban slowly," but they're gone. What about your cars?"

"And nothing to put in 'em," muttered Clayton. "Well, I'll have to see what can be done. Want to walk up to the depot?"

"All right. Allenby will be here pretty soon."

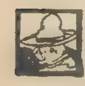
The freight was still at the depot and Clayton immediately explained the situation to the agent.

"I'll tell yuh what we can do," suggested the agent, "We can send 'em up to Bluejoint. Old Sam Bass has been yelling for cars for three days. He's got some stock to ship. Shall I take that chance?"

"Go ahead," urged Clayton. "I don't want the darned things. If Bass can use 'em, he's sure welcome."

Bluejoint was merely a siding and a loading corral about ten miles from Moolock. It was sometimes used by the ranchers of that side of the valley in making small shipments, and was located about two miles from the 27A ranch.

The train crew grumbled audibly, but added the cattle cars to the train, took their orders and steamed away across the valley, while Clayton, Hoban and Omaha went back to wait for Allenby, who rode into town in a buckboard drawn by a pair of cream-colored horses.



FRANK ALLENBY was about fifty years of age, portly and important. When Forty Dollar Dion had declared that Allenby thought the sun arose and set because of the Allenby family, he was not so far wrong. Allenby had a square, protruding jaw, which accentuated the flatness of his cheek-bones, and beneath a slightly hooked nose he wore an aggressive, brush-like, gray mustache.

His suit was of black broadcloth, his boots of finest leather, and his hats were made to order. But he wore an old-fashioned, stiff bosomed shirt, sans collar, but with a huge onyx button; while his cuffs were fastened together with big cameo cuff-buttons. He wore no vest. From a suspender stay dangled a solid gold watch chain, each link at least an inch long.

Hoban met him at the hitch-rack and tied the team, while Allenby got ponderously from the buckboard, the springs of which seemed to sigh with relief. He looked questioningly at Hoban, as though wondering why he was not busy at the loading pens. He could also see Omaha Olsen and Ed Clayton, standing in front of the Elk saloon.

It did not take Hoban long to inform Allenby of his loss, and the big man stiffened, as though to withstand a physical blow. His face paled with anger and then he hunched forward, as if to grapple with his foreman.

"Gone?" he muttered thickly. "You mean that some one stole them?"

"Yuh might say they have," said Hoban slowly. "The padlock on the big gate has been smashed. I told the sheriff about it."

Allenby shook his head like a wounded bull. The pocket-book was Frank Allenby's vital spot, and it nauseated him to think of losing those Herefords. Then he shut his teeth with an audible snap and surged ahead toward the Elk saloon, where he stopped in front of Omaha and the cattle buyer.

"I know about it," said Clayton sympathetically.

"By ——, I know about it, too!" roared Allenby. He was almost crying with anger. "I know who stole those Herefords. By ——, I know! I'll——"

"Go ahead and tell me who stole 'em."

Swan River Smith had crossed the street unnoticed and had heard Allenby's statement. Allenby turned his head and glared at the sheriff. But Allenby's glare did not affect Swan River in the least. The big cattle man's dominating personality meant nothing to the little sheriff.

"Go ahead," urged Swan River. "I'd shore like to hear his name."

"That's my business!" snapped Allenby.

"And mine," added the sheriff. "If you know who stole yore cows tell me his name. If you don't know, Allenby, if yo're only makin' a wild guess—keep it to yourself."

"I'll do as I ——please!"

"Yeah?" Swan River looked him over coldly. "All right. Free speech is yore right, Allenby. But if you ain't got evidence enough to back up the name you mention—the law ain't backin' you."

"I don't need the law. I'll be my own law, by ——!"

"Huh!" Thus the sheriff softly, as he turned and walked back toward his office. Allenby glared after him. Omaha and Clayton smiled; but Hoban's face did not change a line.

"Little pup!" sneered Allenby, half under his breath; but the sheriff was too far away to hear it.

"He isn't much," agreed Clayton. Hoban looked sharply at the cattle-buyer. Hoban knew that Swan River Smith was a thoroughly capable officer, with a fine record behind him.

"Do yuh know who stole 'em?" asked Omaha innocently.

"Do I know who stole 'em?" parroted Allenby. "I do know."

"Well, let's go and get 'em back."

"Fool!" snorted Allenby. "Do you suppose they'd leave 'em where we could find 'em?" He spat viciously and turned to Clayton.

"When will your man be here, Ed?"

"He's due any time now. You just keep calm and let Jim Seeley work on this case. He'll put a stop to it."

"That's the detective?" asked Omaha.

"Sh-h-h-h!" cautioned Clayton. "Don't tell everybody about it."

"I hope he can handle it," said Allenby wearily. "I can't stand losing any more stock. Freeman, the secretary of the association, promised to furnish me with a couple of men, who, he said, are the best in the world on this kind of a case. But they refused to take it. I offered them five thousand dollars for a conviction, but they refused.

"I know who is doing the dirty work, Clayton. I know it just as well as if I had a confession from them; but I need evidence. Nobody else is losing stock. It's spite work, that's all it is. For over two years I've been losing cattle. I sent one man to the penitentiary, and next time I'll send two. If I don't stop 'em, I'll be broke. I'm going home now."

"You heard about the train robbery, didn't you?" asked Clayton.

"Yes. The sheriff chased them to Tecoma, but they got away into the Bearpaw country."

"Suppose there's any connection between the train robbery and the rustlers?"

"No. Too far apart. Are you coming out to the ranch today?"

"I may be out later."

Hoban untied the team and watched Allenby ride back toward the ranch, before joining Omaha and Clayton at the Elk bar.

Hashknife and Sleepy had finished their breakfast in time to see Allenby ride away. The sheriff was standing in the doorway of his office when they arrived, and told them that the big man was Frank Allenby.

"Allenby ain't no woolly little sheep when he's contented," explained Swan River, "so right now he's a ragin' wolf with nothin' in sight to bite into. Somebody busted into the loadin' pens last night and lifted three hundred Hereford cows that were due to take a railroad ride this mornin'."

"Lifted 'em out of a loadin' pen, eh?" grinned Hashknife. "I'll tell a man that's the real handy way to get 'em. Sheriff, I'm of the opinion that this county ain't so law-abidin' that it aches."

"Naw, she ain't," agreed Forty Dollar, trying to get a number nine foot into a number seven boot. " 'F you was a deputy sheriff here for a while you'd find out. This here ain't no office—it's a job, y'betcha."

"Any clues left by the light-fingered gents?" asked Sleepy.

Swan River shook his head.

"Not a clue. There's so darned many cow tracks in this country, and no rain for two months, that yuh never could trail 'em."

"Just have to trust to luck, eh?" Thus Hashknife, interested.

"Yeah—luck."

"Have much rustlin' to contend with?"

"Mm-m-m, not so much. It's a queer thing about the rustlin'. Somebody has been stealin' cows from Allenby for over two years. I've tried every scheme I could think of to nail the guilty party or parties; but they're too slick for me."

"Only from Allenby?" queried Hashknife.

"He's the only one that reports a loss."

"Uh-huh," Hashknife squinted thoughtfully. "Kinda looks like somebody had a grudge against Mr. Allenby, don't it?"

"Do yuh think so?"

"Well, what do you think, sheriff?"

Swan River Smith rubbed his chin thoughtfully. He knew who Allenby suspected. There was a dead weight of evidence against that party right now; but Swan River wanted to be fair. He did not know who Hashknife and Sleepy were, except their names, and he did not want to make any mistakes.

"We don't want to horn into yore business," said Hashknife, reading the sheriff's hesitancy. "It ain't nothin' to us, yuh see. We'd kinda like to get our broncs back though. Them was sure two goshawful good horses."

Swan River looked up grinning.

"I'll betcha they were," he said. "I'd just like to help yuh get 'em back, to see how good they are. C'mon out to the stable."

They went out through the rear door, with Forty Dollar bringing up the rear, stamping his feet to try and stretch his boots. If facial expression means anything he was accomplishing little.

"These are m' dude boots," he explained to Sleepy. "When I dress—I dress to kill."

"Yourself?" asked Sleepy innocently.

Forty Dollar grinned painfully and rested on his high-heels, bracing one hand against the stable door, while the others went inside.

"I want yuh to take a look at the gray and the pinto," said Swan River, pointing out the two horses in adjoining stalls. Hashknife looked them both over carefully and came back beside the sheriff.

"Notice the brands?" asked the sheriff.

"Both HB animals," said Hashknife. "No other brands."

The sheriff squinted at the rumps of the two horses, chewing reflectively on a straw.

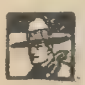
"I didn't need to look at the brands," he said slowly. "I knew the two horses we were chasin' yesterday. Yuh couldn't mistake that pinto. That black head shows it up a mile away. And there ain't many gray horses bein' rode around here."

"Kinda looks like Hank Bell's goose was about cooked," observed Forty Dollar, limping in from the doorway.

"That'll be about all from you," said the sheriff. "Yo're just pessimistic from tight boots."

They went back to the office, where Forty Dollar managed to take off the offending, if gaudy, footwear and put on his old boots.

"Them that wants to be dudes can be dudes," he declared. "'F I can find the drummer what sold me that pair of boots, I'll kick him seven times with each one. I want food, by golly. You fellers had breakfast yet? Yeah? Well, I reckon I can eat by my lonesome."



FORTY DOLLAR grabbed his hat and crossed the street to the Blue Front restaurant, while the other three men lounged in the doorway of the office, smoking thoughtfully. A man rode in past them and dismounted at the Elk saloon. He was not many years past his majority; a thin-faced youth and rather frail of physique.

"That's Allenby's son," said the sheriff, "Harry Allenby. The old man thinks that Harry is the finest piece of man-flesh that ever was whelped. I dunno what in —— he's ever goin' to make out of the kid. Allenby is so ——ed stingy that he wouldn't let the kid go to college; yet he expects him to be President of the United States, I reckon."

"Kinda figures to have him be a self-made man, eh?" smiled Hashknife.

"Somethin' like that. I like Mrs. Allenby. She's sure a nice little woman—too ——ed nice for Allenby. And June is a dinger. June is the daughter. She's about a year younger than Harry, and I reckon he's about twenty-four now."

While they were discussing the Allenbys' affairs two more riders came into the far end of the street and rode toward them. Swan River squinted thoughtfully, watching them ride to the Elk saloon rack.

"There's Bud Bell and 'Sticky' Clay," said Swan River. "Bud is the one on this side—the feller that Allenby sent to the penitentiary. Clay rides for the HB outfit, and he's a gun-man if there ever was one. Oh, oh! C'mon."

The two men had tied their horses and were going toward the saloon door. Swan River stepped off the sidewalk and hurried toward the saloon. After a moment of hesitation, Hashknife and Sleepy hurried after him.

"There's three men from Allenby's in there," explained Swan River, as they reached the sidewalk. "Mebbe it won't mean anythin', but yuh never can tell."

As they went inside Clayton was just buying some chips in a poker game, while Omaha and Hoban were deep in the mysteries of trying to play pool on an uneven table, on which the cushions were as "dead" as strips of mattress. Harry Allenby was at the bar, with a bottle at his elbow, squinting sidewise at Bud Bell and Sticky Clay, who were also at the bar, being served by "Snowy" Barnette, the proprietor.

As far as outward appearances went there was no cause for the sheriff to feel any uneasiness. Bud turned his head and looked at Swan River Smith. It was their first meeting since Bud had come back from the penitentiary. But if Bud felt any malice toward the sheriff, his gray eyes did not show it.

"Hello, Bud," said the sheriff softly. "Goin' to shake hands with me?"

A slight smile flashed across the young man's thin lips and he nodded quickly, as he held out his hand.

"Why shouldn't I, Swan River?" he asked. "You wasn't to blame."

They shook hands solemnly. Omaha and Hoban stopped playing long enough to observe this meeting, and those in the poker game were silent until it was over. Harry Allenby took a lonesome drink and braced his elbows on the bar, hooked one heel over the bar-rail and studied the poker players.

"Howdy, Clay," said the sheriff.

Sticky Clay grinned, showing two rows of bad teeth, and motioned for the sheriff to join them in their drink. Clay was wry-necked, sallow complexioned and almost bald. He seemed to be in bad health, but those who had had trouble with him declared that there was nothing sickly about him.

"Invite yore friends," said Sticky, noticing that Hashknife and Sleepy were with Swan River.

"I'll take a cigar," said Hashknife. "Little too soon after breakfast to drink."

"Thasall right," grinned Clay. "I don't diagnose no man's inside workin's. 'S everybody set? Here's hopin' yuh never get caught."

"Here's hopin' I don't have to catch yuh," smiled the sheriff.

Harry Allenby laughed harshly. The saloon went silent. Swan River had spoken loud enough for every one to hear.

"You won't have to," said Harry meaningly. "A sheriff can do as he —— pleases."

Swan River's eyes narrowed, but he turned away, ignoring the implied insult. He knew that Harry had been drinking more than was good for him, and was willing to excuse him for his words. Bud was only a few feet away from Harry, with no one between them.

"You're drunk, Harry," said Clayton, shoving back from the table. "Better go out and get some fresh air."

Hoban and Omaha carefully placed their billiard cues on the table and moved slowly toward the bar. Harry looked at them and laughed.

"I don't need any help," he assured them, waving them away with a slight gesture of his left hand. "I can take care of myself, y'betcha. Maybe it's none of my business, but when the sheriff comes in and tries to put himself in right with a —— jail-bird of a horse-thief, I'm ——ed if I——"

His right hand jerked to his gun and he swayed from the bar, but his defense was too slow. Before he had finished speaking, Bud Bell had flung himself forward, and Harry Allenby went down from a smash full in the face that flattened his nose and loosened his front teeth.

He fell at the feet of Omaha and Hoban, who made no move to assist him, as they were looking at Sticky Clay, who had stepped into the center of the room, six-shooter swinging at his thigh, a grin on his lips. Harry got slowly to his feet, spitting gore; but the fight had all been taken out of him. His gun was still in its holster, but he had enough for one day.

"Yuh can put up yore gun, Clay," said Hoban. "The kid's been drinkin' too much, thasall."

Sticky Clay grinned and snapped the gun back into the holster. Bud Bell's face was still white with anger, but he turned his back on the blubbering young cowboy, who was being led back to a bucket of water by Omaha Olsen. Clayton looked up at Swan River and said:

"Overlook that, will you, sheriff? Harry is just a fool kid, and he had too much liquor."

"I'll do the best I can," said Swan River seriously. "I hope this will be a lesson to him. Somebody'll kill him for talkin' too much one of these days, Clayton."

"I suppose they will," agreed Clayton, and resumed playing.

BUD and Sticky left the place and crossed to a general merchandise store. In a few minutes Swan River, Hashknife and Sleepy went outside, where they met Forty Dollar. He wailed mightly when Swan River told him what had happened.

"Jist my darned luck!" he exclaimed. "Seems like I'm always eatin' when anythin' good is pulled off. 'F I ever want to see anythin' of the world, I'll have to starve, I reckon. Betcha forty dollars this won't be the end of it."

"I hope you loose that forty dollars sometime," grunted the sheriff. "You've been offerin' that bet ever since I've knowed yuh."

"Nobody ever takes me up, Swan River. I'm game."

"Oh, ——, you never had that much money. I reckon I better go up to the depot and collect a lot of telegrams from the express company. They'll swamp me with 'em for a while, even if there wasn't a two bit piece in that safe."

"How much did they lose?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno. They prob'ly don't know yet. Anyway, there ain't a ghost of a chance to—" Swan River hesitated, cleared his throat harshly and headed for the depot.

"I'd say that he was a square-shooter." observed Hashknife.

"Swan River?" Forty Dollar grinned softly. "Yeah, he's all right. He'd play square with a horse-thief. That's why our jail ain't hardly ever occupied. But don'tcha ever get the idea that the little feller ain't a fighter."

"I wouldn't choose him," smiled Hashknife.

They sauntered across the street and met Bud, who was coming out of the store, followed by Sticky Clay.

"Hyah, Bud," greeted Forty Dollar, holding out his hand.

"Old Forty Dollar Dion, how are yuh?" said Bud softly. "Long time I no see yuh."

They studied each other for several moments.

"Yuh look all right, Bud," said Dion.

"Yeah, I'm all right, Forty. It seems good to see yuh again."

"Thank yuh, Bud. Say, I want you fellers to meet Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens. Gents, this is Bud Bell and Sticky Clay."

The four men shook hands. Bud Bell's eyes never turned from his study of Hashknife, even when he shook hands with Sleepy. It was evident to both Hashknife and Sleepy that Bud Bell had recognized them by name. Sticky's eyes squinted reflectively, as he seemed to try and place them. Hashknife and Sleepy had never traveled incognito, even when knowingly going into an enemy country. Moolock was a long ways from any place where they had operated, and it was not surprizing that more men did not recognize them by name.

There came an awkward pause, broken by Sticky Clay.

"We better be gettin' back to the ranch with this stuff, Bud."

"All right," said Bud. "Pleased to have met yuh, gents."

They walked across to their horses and rode out of town, while Hashknife, Sleepy and Forty Dollar sauntered down to the office.

"Did you ever know that tall puncher?" asked Clay, as he and Bud rode out of town. "Seems like I've heard that name."

"I don't know him," said Bud slowly, thoughtfully, "but I've heard about him, Sticky. There was a man in the penitentiary, servin' time for murder, who told me about him. This convict was part of the Moon River gang. Hartley sent him to the pen."

"Was he the only one of the gang in the pen?" asked Sticky.

"Yeah—the rest died with their boots on."

"Oh, yeah," muttered Sticky. "What do yuh reckon he's doin' around here, Bud?"

Bud shook his head slowly.

"I dunno. Mebbe Allenby has hired him."

"Well, mebbe," said Sticky dubiously. "Yuh never can tell. Still, when you knocked Harry Allenby down, and Hoban and Omaha were comin' from the pool table, I seen this tall puncher's hand swing back toward his gun, and he kinda humped a little. I seen all this out of the corner of of my eye. Mebbe he's hired by Allenby, but I'm wonderin' what would 'a' happened if Allenby's gang had started anythin'."

Bud shook his head and examined his skinned knuckles, which had come in contact with Harry Allenby's teeth.

"I heard," said Sticky Clay, "that Clayton, the cattle-buyer, is goin' to marry June Allenby."

Bud looked up quickly, but Sticky was looking straight ahead, his sombero pulled low over his eyes. For several moments they rode silently. Bud's thin lips twisted painfully, as he said—

"Well, she'd sure make him a good wife."

"That side of it is all right," observed Sticky. "She'd make any man a good wife."

"If he was lucky enough to get her," said Bud softly.

Sticky squinted sidewise under the protection of his wide hat at Bud, who was gazing unblinkingly at the bobbing ears of his horse.

FRANK ALLENBY fairly boiled with indignation when Chet Hoban told him what had happened in the Elk saloon. Harry had refused to come home with Hoban and Omaha. Hoban told Allenby exactly what had transpired, without excusing Harry in any way.

Allenby did not stop to consider that Harry had been a foolish young man; he only saw the disgrace to the Allenby family in having an ex-convict knock his son down in a saloon brawl.

"Why didn't you and Omaha defend him?" he demanded hotly.

Hoban shook his head slowly.

"Harry was wrong; and Sticky Clay had every man in the room covered before Harry went down. And Clay will shoot."

"Well, perhaps," grudgingly. "And Harry wouldn't come home, eh?"

"No."

"He must feel the disgrace keenly." Allenby turned away and went into the house. Hoban squinted after him and went back toward the bunk-house, where Omaha was stretched out on a bunk, reading a paper-backed novel.

"How'd he take it?" asked Omaha.

"Rearin' straight up," said Hoban humorously. "I told him that Harry wouldn't come home, and he said that Harry must feel the disgrace keenly."

"My ——!" grunted Omaha. "'The disgrace keenly,' eh? Didja tell him everythin' that Harry said?"

"Every word, cowboy."

"He ought to be proud of his offspring."

"That's the —— of it, Omaha—he is."

June Allenby was in the living-room of the ranch-house when her father came in after his talk with Chet Hoban, and she could see that he was greatly perturbed. June was a tall, slender girl, with an unruly crown of soft brown hair above a face that the cowboys of the Moolock swore, "has anythin' beat that ever came over the hills." But June was not of the clinging-vine type, nor was she ever guilty of parading her own beauty.

Allenby flung himself down in an easy chair that creaked a protest, and stared moodily at the well-worn Navajo rug under his feet.

"What has gone wrong now, Dad?" asked June, closing the book she had been reading.

He lifted his head and stared at her.

"Wrong? Everything is wrong. Bud Bell whipped your brother in the Elk saloon today. Knocked him down like a dog!" Allenby grasped the arms of the chair, as though trying to tear them from their moorings.

June colored slightly and looked away.

"Why did he do it?" she asked calmly.

"Why?" snorted her father. "Possibly Bud Bell thought it would help to pay me back for sending him to prison."

"Don't you know what started it?"

"What difference does that make?"

"Had Harry been drinking?"

"Drinking? He doesn't——"

"Yes, he does, Dad. Omaha told me——"

"Oh, pshaw! They all drink a little. Harry isn't a drinker."

"Perhaps it doesn't take much liquor to make him drunk."

Allenby stared at June for several seconds. He chuckled angrily and got to his feet.

"June are you trying to defend Bud Bell?"

"No, I——"

"You met him at several dances before——"

June sprang to her feet and they looked squarely at each other. Then Allenby laughed harshly, and June whirled on her heel and left the room.

"By ——, that would make the —— laugh," he told the empty room. "That —— rustler!"

He turned to the front door as a vehicle rattled over the hard ground outside, and he stepped out to see Clayton and a stranger getting out of a buggy. The stranger was of medium size, dark feature and with a small, black mustache. He was dressed in dark clothes, soft shirt and a stiff-brim Stetson hat.

"Mr. Allenby, meet Mr. Seeley—Jim Seeley."

They shook hands jerkily. Clayton took a big suit-case from the buggy and placed it on the porch.

"Kind of a pretty place yuh got here, Mr. Allenby," said Seeley, glancing around. "I never seen a cow-ranch with so much paint before. You believe in dudin' it up, don'tcha?"

"Just because it is a cattle ranch, there is no need of living like savages," replied Allenby.

"Mr. Allenby is several jumps ahead of the rest of the country," declared Clayton. "He's progressive. His ranch-house is as fine as a home in the city, and I'll defy you to find a broken board, loose post or a loose wire on the place."

Seeley laughed.

"I'm not goin' to look."

"Well, you couldn't find it," declared Allenby proudly. "I've seen to it all myself. Do you intend to stay right here?"

"Why not?" asked Seeley. "I'm workin' for you now."

"Well, I'm glad to have you," said Allenby. "And when I hire a man I want him where I can see that he is on the job all the time. Come on in and meet the family."

Seeley shot a side glance at Clayton, who was trying to suppress a smile, and they followed Allenby into the house.

"Now who do yuh reckon that is?" queried Omaha, who was looking out of the window and saw the three men going into the house.

Hoban joined him and took a look at the stranger.

"That must be the private investigator that Clayton sent for," said Hoban dryly. "Allenby has had the detective idea for quite a while, it seems. He lost faith in the Cattle Association, and had some words with the secretary, who promised to get him a first-class cow detective; but it seems that Allenby didn't ante high enough to get this man."

"He wouldn't," agreed Omaha, turning away from the window. "I don't like to appear disloyal, but personally I think that Allenby is so stingy that he takes out his false teeth at night to save the wear and tear from his snores."

OMAHA went back to his paper-backed novel, while Chet Hoban sat down to play a game of solitaire. About fifteen minutes later Harry Allenby came in. His nose was badly swollen, as was his upper lip; but he was well loaded with liquor, and if he had been disgraced he did not show it.

"Whoozup at th' house?" he asked thickly, trying to point in the direction of the ranch-house.

"Clayton and a stranger," grunted Hoban.

"Whooza stranger?"

"I dunno," Hoban was trying to concentrate on the layout.

"Zasso?" Harry sat down on the bunk and looked owlishly at Omaha, who grinned behind his book.

"He's a detective, sonny," said Omaha patiently. "He's come here to save yore papa's li'l cowlets."

"Zasso?" Harry blinked thoughtfully. "Zee a goo' one?"

"Shore is," nodded Omaha. "He's the jigger that found the 'Lost Chord,' if yuh know what that is."

"Yezzir, I dunno. Ol' man up at the house?"

"Yeah, he's there. If I was you I'd doctor up that nose and lip, Harry. Yo're a —— of a lookin' thing, if yuh ask me."

"You better crawl into bed and sleep it off," said Hoban, without looking up. "Don't let yore dad see yuh drunk."

"Zasso?" Harry stumbled over to a mirror and looked at himself with one eye shut.

"I'm a sweet lookin' lily, tha's a cinch," he concluded.

He came back to the center of the room, as though the sight of himself had sobered him a little.

"I'm goin' back to town," he decided.

"You better stay right here," advised Hoban. "Shuck off yore clothes and go to bed.

"Not 'f I can get away without the folks seein' me."

He opened the door cautiously, peered out for several moments before going out after his horse. Omaha went to the window and watched Harry make his sneak back toward town.

"Danged fool kid," opined Hoban.

"Yeah," nodded Omaha, "he's a fool all right, I s'pose. Still he's old enough to know what he wants. I blame Allenby more than I do the kid. He won't even pay Harry a cowpuncher's wages."

Some one was talking just outside the door; so Omaha went to the window and looked out at Swan River Smith and Forty Dollar Dion, who had just ridden up to the bunk-house.

"The law has found us out, Chet," he said as he threw the door open.

"Howdy, officers," he called. "Get down and appear amiable."

"Hello, Omaha," grinned Swan River. "Is Allenby at home? I mean 'Mr.' Allenby."

Omaha grinned widely and pointed toward the house, where Allenby, Clayton and Seeley had come out on the porch. Clayton got into the buggy and drove away, and after a few moments of conversation Allenby and Seeley came down to the bunk-house.

Allenby did not introduce Seeley to any of them, but spoke directly to the sheriff—

"Something you wanted, Mr. Smith?"

"Nothin' I exactly wanted, Mr. Allenby," said the sheriff. "It was kinda in regard to yore loss of last night. In reply I can say that I ain't been able to find any clue—yet. In yore talk of this mornin' you kinda intimated that you suspected somebody of purloinin' yore cows, and if you ain't got nothin' else to do right now, I'd kinda like to have yuh explain yore suspicions to me. Sincerely yours, Swan River Smith, sheriff of Moolock."

Swan River had intoned the whole statement, as though dictating a letter, and Allenby's ears reddened quickly. Omaha smothered a grin; but Forty Dollar Dion laughed outright. Allenby glared angrily at Forty Dollar, but that worthy did not mind.

"Are you trying to be smart, or just funny?" Allenby asked the sheriff.

"It's all in the point of view," said Swan River evenly.

"All right," Allenby spat viciously. "As far as my losses are concerned, you may just forget them. I am not asking any assistance from the sheriff's office, and I don't care to have you volunteer any. I hope you understand what I mean."

"——, you didn't leave many loopholes for a mistake to crawl through," grinned Swan River. "But yore likes and dislikes don't mean nothin' to me, Allenby. I'm the sheriff of this county, and I want to tell you ——"

"Pardon me, but you can't tell me anything." Thus Allenby .

"That's the whole trouble with you," said Swan River slowly. "You think that yo're a tin god around here, Allenby. Another thing yuh might do without any advice from me—and that is to look after that half-baked kid of yours.

"He came danged near gettin' what was comin' to him today, when he opened his mouth too wide. You've brought him up to think too ——ed much of the name of Allenby. Now I'm tellin' this to you for yore own good. And yuh might preach it to him and practice a little of it yoreself. When you've got some evidence that'll hold good in court, let me look at it. In the meantime, think what yuh please, but keep yore mouth shut. I hate to conduct coroner's inquests. *Adios.*"

The two officers turned their horses and rode away, leaving Allenby gasping with wrath. Omaha stepped back into the bunk-house, where he could laugh in safety, while Allenby spluttered and told the wide world what he thought of Swan River Smith.

Finally he introduced Seeley to Chet Hoban, but did not tell Hoban what Seeley's business was. In fact Allenby was too mad to tell anything.

"We're going to town, Chet," he said hoarsely. "I'll hitch up the team myself."

He and Seeley went toward the stable, and Hoban leaned against the doorway until they drove away. Omaha, his face tear-streaked, came out to watch them depart.

"Prob'ly goin' down to tell his son that the fatted calf is almost ready for the barbecue," said Omaha hoarsely.

"More likely goin' down to save his little lamb from the slaughter," said Hoban. "Me and you better fix a new lock on this bunk-house, Omaha. The next thing we know, somebody will steal us."

FOR the next two days Moolock was devoid of excitement. Hashknife and Sleepy spent their time loafing around the Elk saloon and the sheriff's office. They had made the acquaintance of several cowboys, but had not tried to secure work. Hashknife suggested that they move on, but Sleepy demurred.

"Somethin' tells me that Moolock is a good place for to be, Hashknife," he stated. "The poker games ain't too avaricious, they put up good food, and I ain't found a bug in that hotel. Yuh don't find many places as good as this, cowboy."

Swan River and Forty Dollar had scoured the country, trying to see what they could see; but there was no trace of Allenby's three hundred Herefords. The express company had flooded Swan River with correspondence regarding the robbery but as yet they had offered no reward.

"I marked them off my slate, as soon as they got into the Bearpaws," stated Swan River. "I'd like to see you fellers get yore brones back."

"Me, too," said Sleepy. "They was the best pair of animals that ever wore a saddle, y'betcha. Whooee, but that roan of mine was a bird."

"I'll betcha," nodded Swan River. "It could run a mile in spite of ——."

"Just about that fast," agreed Sleepy. "It was one of them famous A-rab steeds, noted for endurance. It was the horse that the old emperor or somethin' or other meant when he yelled that he'd trade his kingdom for a horse. Yessir, I'm sure pinin' a lot for that hammer-headed, ringboned hunk of coyote bait."

"Speakin' of horses," observed Hashknife, "I'd like to play somebody a game of bottle-pool for the championship of Sweden."

"I'll poke yuh a game," offered Forty Dollar quickly.

Swan River and Sleepy agreed to hold stakes and keep the score, but before the quartet reached the Elk saloon, Jack Merton, owner of the Arrowhead outfit, and Pete Sepulveda, one of his cowboys, came riding down the street, leading two horses.

Hashknife and Sleepy looked quickly at each other, as they recognized their horses. There was no mistaking Hashknife's tall bay and Sleepy's hammer-headed roan. Merton waved to the sheriff, and he and Sepulveda tied the four horses to the Elk saloon hitch-rack, and the four men waited for the two riders.

"Seen anybody that lost two horses?" asked Merton, a tall well-built cowboy, with a pleasant cast of countenance, indicating the horses. "These two were camped at my stable this mornin'; so I brought 'em in, sheriff. One's branded with a JK and the other with a Triangle-6. They don't show in my register book."

"They belong to us," grinned Hashknife.

"F'r gosh sake!" exclaimed Swan River. "Is them the two saddle-racks yuh been wailin' about. Well, well, well! Huh!"

"What about it?" asked Merton interestedly.

"Well," Swan River scratched his head thoughtfully. "it ain't ready for explanation, Jack. You just take my word for it that the horses belongs to these gents, will yuh?"

"Anythin' you say, Swan River," Merton grinned and hitched up his chaps.

"That's fine of yuh," admitted Swan River, and proceeded to introduce Merton and Sepulveda to Hashknife and Sleepy. They all adjourned into the saloon, and a few minutes later another rider came into town.

It was not difficult to see that this rider's veins carried a certain percentage of Indian blood. He was nearly six feet tall, a trifle gaudy in his spotted, calf-skin vest and scarlet muffler, together with a canary-yellow shirt. He was about forty-five years of age, with a deeply lined face and prominent cheek-bones.

He looked over the horses at the rack, especially the two strange ones, before dismounting. Seemingly satisfied with his inspection he tied his sorrel horse at the rack, adjusted his belt and went into the saloon.

"Well, here's Sam Bass comin' to town!" exclaimed Swan River, as the newcomer approached the bar. "How are yuh, Sam?"

"Pretty —— good; you bet," laughed Bass. "Hello, Forty Dollar. Hello, Merton. How are you? By golly, here's Pete Sepulveda!"

"Have a drink," invited Swan River.

"Sure I drink whisky. Pretty —— dry these days."

They pored out their drinks and Swan River introduced Hashknife and Sleepy to Sam Bass, who grunted and grinned widely.

"I see two strange horses at the rack,"

he stated. "I don't know the brands; so I s'pose strangers here. You ride bareback, eh?"

"Well, here's regards," said Hashknife, ignoring Bass' question. He knew that Swan River did not want to explain about the lost horses. Bass noticed the evasion, and elevated his brows slightly; but drank his liquor and did not bring up the subject again.

"You don't happen to know of somebody that wants to hire a couple of good punchers, do yuh?" Thus Hashknife, speaking to Merton.

Merton shook his head and motioned to the bartender to get busy again.

"No, I don't," he said. "I've got a full crew. Maybe Sam needs some help."

"Not much," replied Bass quickly. "I got too much help now. 'Pinon' Meade and Lem Elder set in the shade all the time."

"Must take a lot of shade for all three of yuh," observed Swan River.

Sam Bass laughed loudly, nodding excitedly.

"By golly, that's right!" he exploded. "I'm lazy too. Swan River knows. Some cattlemen work all the time. Look at Allenby. He make new fence, paint it pretty; paint the house. He's rich. Sam Bass let ranch go to ——; he's poor.

"Allenby work all the time; worry, too, I guess. He's —— fool. Sam Bass never work much, never worry no time. He's —— fool, too. Let's have another drink, eh? Drink to two fools."

"Allenby wouldn't appreciate that," laughed Merton. "He sure thinks he's a wise man. Personally, I think that Sam Bass is right."

"Danged right he is," agreed Forty Dollar. "Any old time a man says that Allenby is a fool, I'll agree with him."

"What about Allenby losin' three hundred head of Herefords?" asked Merton. "Was it a fact?"

"You ask Allenby," laughed Forty Dollar. "It gave him plumbago."

"Plumbago is lead," stated Swan River. "You don't mean plumbago; you mean lumbago, Forty."

"Thasso?" Forty Dollar emptied his glass and wiped off his chin. "If I shoot a man, I give him plumbago, do I?"

"If yuh shot him with a lead-pencil, Forty."

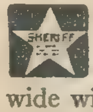
"My ——!" grunted Forty Dollar. "That liquor shore does take a-holt of yuh, Swan River. Shoot him with a lead-pencil!"

Forty Dollar stared around at the rest of the men, his eyes wide with wonder.

"You fellers better exchange a few last words with Swan River Smith, while he still has a little *sabe* left," he said softly. "It shore is the turnin' point in his glorious career. I'd rather see him dead than to not know anythin'. —— knows he's always been bad enough, but this is too much."

Forty Dollar Dion buried his face in his elbows on the bar and began crying.

"That danged fool always gets a cryin' jag on, after about six drinks," said Swan River disgustedly. "Let him cry."



SOME one passed a sack of tobacco and they were rolling cigarets, when a tow-headed youngster, his eyes wide with wonder, tiptoed into the saloon and looked at the group at the bar.

"What do yuh want, sonny?" asked the bartender.

"I—I want the sheriff," faltered the youngster.

"Me?" asked Swan River. "What do yuh want, son?"

"You—you better come out here." The lad turned and fairly ran out of the place.

"Mebbe I better," agreed Swan River quickly, and he was followed by every one, except Forty Dollar and the bartender.

The boy was on the sidewalk, pointing excitedly toward the hitch-rack, where a man sat drunkenly on a horse, reins dragging.

"That looks danged funny!" exclaimed the sheriff, as they all hurried out to the man. He was roped to the saddle with a long lariat, and tied to the rope, where it circled the man's neck, was a fairly fresh cow-hide.

It was Seeley, Allenby's detective. His face was gray as ashes, except where it was caked with blood; and there was blood all over his shirt. It appeared that the man had been shot in the head and in the body. Hashknife took out his knife and cut the ropes, while the others lowered the man to the sidewalk.

He groaned painfully and collapsed. Swan River sent one of the men after a doctor. Hashknife spread out the cowhide. It had been taken from a Hereford two-year-old, and the brand on the right shoulder was a Half-Circle Cross.

"Does anybody know him?" asked Swan River. "Ain't he the feller who was stayin' at Allenby's place?"

"He was here with Allenby yesterday," offered the bartender, who had left Forty Dollar alone.

"It kinda looks like he'd collected the hide of one of Allenby's missin' Herefords," said Hashknife. "He's got creased along the head, and it kinda looks like there might be a bullet in his right shoulder, which made him lose quite some gore."

The youngster came racing back with the information that the doctor wanted them to bring the man down to his home. Some one got a blanket from the hotel, and there were plenty of men to carry the wounded man down to the doctor's office. Swan River carried the cow-hide over in front of his office and draped it across the little hitch-rack.

"What do yuh make of it, Hartley?" he asked seriously. "Why would anybody shoot this man, tie him to a saddle and send him back with that cow-hide?"

"You want my opinion, Swan River?"

"Y'betcha."

"Well, I ain't got one. It kinda looks to me like somebody was trying' to take a slap at Mr. Allenby."

Swan River sighed deeply. All this was only piling up misery for him.

"I suppose I've got to make an arrest pretty soon," he said slowly. "I ain't got a bit of evidence to make it on; but the arrow points just one way. Still—I dunno."

He got up and walked to the door of the office. Hank and Bud Bell were dismounting at the general store.

"There's old Hank Bell," he told Hashknife, pointing at the angular little man, who carried his right arm sharply bent at the elbow. They disappeared into the store, and Swan River turned to Hashknife.

"That Pinto and gray belong to old Hank," he said softly. "Bud rides the pinto."

"You still got 'em in yore stable?" asked Hashknife.

"Sure thing. When they start inquiring about lost horses, it'll be time enough for me to do my talkin'. Nobody, except the four of us know about 'em."

Hashknife walked up to the store and went inside. He was curious to see old Hank Bell. Bud was buying some cartridges from the proprietor, who was telling him about the stranger who had been shot. Old Hank seemed indifferent to the telling, but Hashknife could see that the old man was not missing a word of it.

Old Hank was of the old school of cattlemen. He was small, wiry of frame, thin faced; his white hair reaching to his collar. His eyes were small and as hard as agate, but there were enough grin-wrinkles around them to prove that old Hank Bell was not always serious. His right arm was crippled in such a way that he was unable to reach below his waist; and Hashknife noticed that the old man wore his holster on the left side, tied down.

"Regular old he-wolf," Hashknife told himself. "Taught himself to draw and shoot left-handed."

The proprietor finished telling his story, and a ghost of a smile flitted across old Hank's lips, when the proprietor spoke about the Half-Circle Cross cow-hide that was hanging from the man's neck.

Bud turned and nodded to Hashknife. He spoke aside to his father, who shot a quick glance at Hashknife. Pete Sepulveda came into the store and spoke to Hashknife—

"That feller was shot twice, Hartley. The one creased his head and won't amount to much; but the other one went plumb through him. He was shot from behind. The doctor dunno whether it'll kill him or not. Do you know who he is?"

"Nope. Somebody said he was stayin' at Allenby's place."

"Allenby just drove in. I seen him comin' as I came in here."

Hashknife walked to the door and looked up the street. Allenby and his daughter were in the buckboard, stopped in the middle of the street, talking to one of the men who had just come from the doctor's office. As Hashknife watched them Allenby whipped up his team and went toward the doctor's place.

Bud completed his purchases and walked across to the Elk saloon, followed by his father, who gave Hashknife a searching glance as he went past.

"He's a tough old pelican," declared Sepulveda. "Don't think he's been in a a shootin' scrape since he got his arm smashed; but I'm bettin' that he *sabes* how to shoot left-handed. Them old jiggers shoot first and talk afterward.

"Old Hank used to be awful fast with a gun. He had a funny way of gettin' his gun, Hartley. He'd kinda swing his hand behind the holster—like a feller might swing his hand when he's walkin'—and on the back swing he pulled and shot all to once. I dunno how he done it. I've tried to do it. They tell me that he learned Bud how to do it; but I ain't never seen Bud have to shoot—yet."

They walked outside and joined Sleepy and Merton.

"Allenby is throwin' a fit," declared Sleepy. "He acts like he was the one that got shot. I asked him who this feller was, and he told me it was none of my business—which it wasn't. I've heard a lot of profanity, but Allenby's got 'em all skinned."

"Not in front of his daughter, did he?" asked Hashknife.

"No, she didn't stay; she drove back to the post-office."

Swan River Smith and Sam Bass were coming down the street toward the store; but crossed the street and went to the White Horse saloon.

"I'll buy a drink," offered Sepulveda, and Sleepy accepted; but Hashknife shook his head.

"Thank yuh just the same, Sepulveda. Mebbe I'll join yuh later."

Sleepy and Sepulveda went to the saloon, leaving Hashknife leaning against the front of the store, cogitating over certain things.

Bud Bell came out of the saloon, as Sleepy and Sepulveda went in. He declined their invitation to drink and came over to the store.

"How is everythin' today, Hartley?" he asked, as he went past.

"Oh, kinda interestin'," smiled Hashknife.

June Allenby was coming down the street, carrying some packages in her hands. It was the first time that Hashknife had seen her, and he was forced to agree with Forty Dollar Dion, that June Allenby was a "dinger."

It was not like Hashknife to stare at a lady, but he did. In fact he was so interested in her that he did not hear Bud Bell come out of the store. June lifted her eyes from the sidewalk and looked straight past Hashknife, who turned his head and discovered Bud Bell.

They had both stopped and were staring at each other. Hashknife wished that he was on the opposite side of the street instead of almost directly between these two. Then Bud stepped to the edge of the sidewalk, as though to start across the street; but the girl halted him with a motion of her hand.

"Bud," she said, "aren't you going to even say hello?"

Bud's hand went uncertainly to his sombrero, but his eyes shifted from June and glanced quickly around.

"Yes'm, I reckon that wouldn't hurt anybody—and I don't want to hurt you."

He stepped off the sidewalk and headed swiftly across the street. Hashknife watched June's face, as she followed him with her eyes until he went into the Elk saloon. Hashknife wanted to speak to her—to tell her that he would help to straighten things out—but he was tongue-tied. Perhaps she read his intentions in his eyes as she passed him and went into the store.

"She loves Bud Bell!" he told himself wonderingly. "Can yuh beat that? This is sure a queer old world. And in spite of all the trouble Frank Allenby has caused Bud Bell, I'm bettin' that Bud Bell loves Allenby's daughter. He said he didn't want to hurt her. I wonder if he meant—oh, well, let's see."

He hooked his thumb over the waistband of his overalls and considered the situation for a space of time. His eyes shifted to their two horses at the Elk saloon hitch-rack.

"By golly, I've got to fix a place for them broncs," he told himself, "and this is as good a time as any, I reckon."

He turned on his heel and went slowly down the street.

HASHKNIFE was barely out of sight when Allenby came from the doctor's home. His face was black with anger and his hands were clenched at his sides as he strode along. Near the door of the Elk saloon he stopped and studied the horses at the hitchracks. Over in front of the store stood the two horses which Hank Bell and his son had ridden.

"Both here," muttered Allenby, half-aloud. "By ——, I've stood enough!" He turned, spat viciously, grimacing, as though he tasted wormwood and gall, and went into the saloon.

Swan River Smith and Pete Sepulveda saw him cross in front of the White Horse saloon, and they lost no time in crowding into the saloon behind him. He was standing in the middle of the room, looking at Hank Bell, who was standing at the bar with Sleepy and Sam Bass. He did not notice that the sheriff was behind him.

Bud was sitting beside a card-table, looking at an old newspaper, but now his eyes shifted to Allenby.

"I've stood about all I'm going to, Bell," Allenby spoke to old Hank in a shaking voice. Hank Bell turned slowly, his left hand swinging back of him, as though to shove him away from the bar.

"Look out," whispered Pete Sepulveda, who knew what that movement meant.

Allenby was not a gun-man. It is doubtful if he could have hit Hank Bell at that distance; but his anger had made him forget all caution. He wanted to crush this little, crooked-armed old man. But Hank Bell was not going to fight him. He stood there, poised easily, his left hand splayed out behind him.

But before anything more could be said, Swan River Smith butted Allenby with his left shoulder, while with his right hand he snatched Allenby's gun from its holster. The jolt turned the big man half-around and he struck at the little sheriff; but Swan River easily dodged the blow and stepped between Allenby and Hank Bell.

"And that'll be about all of this show," said Swan River calmly. "If you fellers want to go gunnin' for each other, you better go out on the flat somewhere."

"I wasn't gunnin' for anybody," said old Hank slowly, "but I hate to disappoint anybody when they ask me for trouble."

"Tha'sall right, Hank." Swan River turned to Allenby—"Some day, Allenby, you'll make a mistake. And it'll probably be the kind of a mistake that a man only makes once in a lifetime. I don't blame yuh for bein' mad—but yuh ought to use judgment."

"What was this to you?" demanded Allenby hotly. "You had no right to interfere with my business. Give me back that gun!"

Swan River grinned and shoved the gun inside the waist-band of his overalls.

"When yuh get ready to go home, I'll just do that," he said. "I'm kinda responsible for the wear and tear on Moolock, yuh know."

"You're responsible for a lot of things," sneered Allenby. "I came to town to get a little information from you, Smith. This morning I had a little talk with a man named Pierson. He's from Tecoma. He told me a little story about you being at Tecoma the other night—the evening of the day that the express robbery was pulled off.

"He told me about two men whose horses were stolen by the bandits—and he told me about a pinto and a gray that were left at the hitch-rack. The pinto had a coal black head. Pierson saw the brands, too. What about it?"

Swan River squinted at Sleepy and his brows drew into a deep frown. He realized that there was nothing more he could do to keep that evidence under cover. Hank Bell and Bud were looking straight at each other, and now Bud got to his feet.

"Take it easy," advised Sleepy softly. Bud flashed a glance at him, as though wondering why Sleepy had said that.

"Well, what about it?" asked Allenby triumphantly.

He felt that he was putting the screws to Swan River Smith, and he knew that it was not welcome news to the Bell family.

"What about it?" queried Swan River vacantly. "Huh! Pierson told yuh this, did he?"

"Yes, he did. Would he have any reason to lie?"

"No-o-o, I don't reckon he would, Allenby."

"What about the pinto and gray?" asked Bell wonderingly.

Swan River pursed his lips, as he shook his head slowly.

"You've got those horses," declared Allenby. "You've had them ever since that night."

Swan River did not deny it. Sepulveda turned to Sleepy.

"That's how you lost your two horses, eh?"

Sleepy ignored the question.

"Are they in your stable or at the livery-barn?" asked Allenby.

"Yuh might find out by lookin'," said Swan River.

"All right!" snapped Allenby. "You know as well as I do that those two horses belong to Hank Bell. Now what are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it?" parroted Swan River.

"Yes! Are you going to let them escape while we go to look at the evidence?"

Swan River squinted at Hank and Bud.

"Are yuh?" he asked.

Old Hank shook his head and said—

"I'd rather fight than run, Swan River. Suppose we go with yuh."

"That's a —— of a way to run your office!" exploded Allenby. "Some of these days——"

"Suppose you stay here, Allenby," suggested Swan River blandly.

"No, by ——! All I want is a square deal. Will we go to the livery-barn first?"

"Suit yoreself."

THEY all trooped to the livery-stable, where it did not take them long to find that the horses were not there. Back they went to the sheriff's stable, behind his office, where they found Hashknife, busily currying the tall bay. In the next stall stood the JK roan, belonging to Sleepy, and in the other two stalls stood Swan River's sorrel and Forty Dollar's buckskin.

Hashknife looked curiously at the crowd, but did not cease grooming his horse. Swan River leaned against the doorway and rubbed his chin, while the rest of the crowd looked around blankly and came outside.

"I—I hope yore satisfied," said Swan River chokingly.

"Satisfied, ——!" snorted Allenby. He was no longer the triumphant person of a few minutes ago. Old Hank scratched his head foolishly, and motioned to Bud.

"You don't want us for anythin' more do yuh?" Old Hank spoke to Swan River.

"Shucks, no," said Swan River. "I reckon everybody's satisfied."

"I hope so," said old Hank. "C'mon, Bud."

They walked back through the alley, leaving Allenby staring after them, his lips working painfully. He turned on the sheriff.

"What crooked work is this?" he demanded hotly. "You just the same as admitted that you had those horses."

"I didn't admit nothin'," denied Swan River. "I was willin' to prove that I didn't."

Allenby went back toward the street without another word.

"I'd buy a drink," stated Pete Sepulveda. "I'd buy a drink for everybody."

Sam Bass, Merton and several more of the crowd accepted on the spot; but Sleepy had already gone to work grooming his roan. Swan River sat down on the feed-box and watched the two cowboys work on their horses, until the rest of the men had gone back.

"I thought they had yuh, Swan River," said Sleepy, pausing to clean his curry-comb. "Yuh could 'a' knocked me down with a straw."

"Yeah, I felt the same about it." Swan River squinted at Hashknife questioningly, but the tall cowboy's face was serious. For several minutes there was nothing but the "swish" of the curry-comb and brush to break the silence. Finally Hashknife stepped back, looked the bay over carefully and threw the comb and brush into a box against the wall. He walked to the door and looked out, as he brushed off his shirt.

"Hartley," said Swan River softly. "Did you know that Pierson had talked with Allenby?"

"Pierson?"

"Yeah. He's the feller who runs the saloon at Tecoma. Didja know that Pierson told Allenby about those two horses—the pinto and the gray?"

"No-o-o, I didn't know it. We needed a place to put our broncs, and I didn't feel like payin' a livery-stable to keep 'em."

Swan River took a deep breath and looked at Sleepy, who had ceased work while Hashknife was talking.

"And that's about all you'll ever get out of him," said Sleepy knowingly.

"Well," Swan River sighed with satisfaction, "that's enough to suit me. Mebbe we're all wrong, I dunno. Anyway, I thank yuh, Hashknife. It saved me from a lot of explainin'."

"Yo're welcome, sheriff," said Hashknife. He was thinking of a girl who wanted a boy to say hello to her; a boy who was afraid that even a hello from him might harm her.

"This is a —— of a world," he said thoughtfully.

"It sure is," agreed Swan River. "We don't ask to get in; get —— while we're here, and get out because we can't help ourselves. My old dad used to say—

" 'Eat a lot of green vegetables, keep yore mouth shut and yore gun cocked—and you'll live a long time.' "

Sleepy laughed and put up his brush.

"How close do yuh foller that advice?" he asked.

"Well," grinned Swan River, "I keep my gun cocked quite a lot of the time. I figure that's what they call a necessary of life—anyway around here."

A LAPSE of twenty-four hours had made little difference in Allenby's feelings toward the rest of the world. Seeley was still alive, but the doctor held out little hope for his recovery. The soft-nose bullet had just about wrecked one of his lungs, and the other had caused a slight concussion of the brain.

Clayton has just brought in the latest report of Seeley's condition, and Allenby had called a meeting at the bunk-house. Harry was sober but just a bit shaky; Omaha amused: Boban serious. It was then that Allenby told them all about hiring Seeley to investigate for him.

"They shot him down like a dog," Allenby told them angrily. "They have probably added murder to their other crimes. There is no doubt in my mind that either the sheriff, his deputy, or one of those two strange cowboys turned that pinto and gray horse loose, to ruin the evidence.

"Just what interest those two cowboys have in this deal, I do not know. I feel sure that Swan River Smith thought those two horses were in the stable, and that he was as surprized as any one else when we did not find them. The sheriff is against us; so it is up to us to handle it in the only way possible—go and settle it ourselves."

"How do yuh mean?" asked Hoban.

"I mean that we'll ride down to the HB ranch, force them to confess and take them to jail ourselves."

"Christmas daisies!" grunted Omaha. "You talk like we was goin' out to bring in a cow."

Allenby glared at Omaha. He did not believe in any one questioning an order or a suggestion from him.

"Are you afraid to do this, Olsen?" he asked.

"No, I ain't afraid," said Omaha meaningly. "I just don't think it can be done, tha'sall. You might get a —— of a lot of hot lead, but yuh won't get no confession."

"Would you refuse to go?" asked Allenby.

Omaha squinted at the floor for several moments before he looked up at Allenby and nodded slowly—

"Yeah, I reckon I would. If I caught a man stealin' yore cows, I'd shoot him as quick as you would; but I don't reckon I'm goin' to try and take the law in my own hands and try to make a man confess. That's up to the officers—not to me."

"All right," said Allenby briskly. "Your wages up to date are ready for you, Olsen. I want men who will do my bidding. How about you, Hoban?"

"I'll ride with Omaha," said Hoban calmly. "We came here together, yuh know. I've handled yore cows, Allenby—you handle yore own killin'."

Allenby snorted audibly and looked around. He had been sure of Hoban, because Hoban was his foreman. It left only three of them to do the job—and he wasn't so sure of Clayton.

"Well, that makes things different," he decided grudgingly.

"Decidedly," agreed Clayton. "Perhaps the idea wasn't as good as it might have been. You see, Allenby, you haven't enough evidence yet to force a confession from either of the Bell family."

"Well, how can I get it?" demanded Allenby. "I'd give five thousand dollars for evidence enough to convict those two men."

No one seemed to know—which was not surprizing.

"Who are those two cowboys?" asked Allenby.

"One is named Hartley and the other one Stevens," offered Harry. "I heard that much about 'em. The tall one is nicknamed Hashknife."

Allenby squinted closely at Harry.

"Are you sure of that, Harry?" he asked.

"Well, that's what they're called."

"That's funny," muttered Allenby, turning to Clayton. "That is the names of the two men that Freeman, the secretary of the Cattle Association, spoke to me about. They refused my offer, but still they came here."

"Hartley and Stevens, eh?" said Clayton wonderingly. "Who sent them in here, I wonder?"

"I've done all the wondering I'm going to," declared Allenby, turning to the door. "I'm going to town and find these two men. My offer is still open, and I think they'll accept it, after I tell them what it means to me."

"How soon can I get my pay?" asked Omaha. Allenby halted half-way outside and looked back.

"We will take that up later, Olsen. Are you going with me, Clayton?"

"Yes, I'll go with you," agreed Clayton.

They drove away in a cloud of dust, swinging out through the main gate on two wheels. Omaha grinned and sat down on his bunk.

"I suppose that me and you are canned, Chet," he said.

"Yo're canned," corrected Chet, "I quit."

"Aw, ——!" blurted Harry. "The old man will forget all that in an hour. You fellers got anythin' drinkable around here?"

"You lay off the booze," advised Hoban. "The first thing you know the old man will cut you off his will."

"Is that so?" Harry laughed sarcastically. "That'll hurt me a —— of a lot. He never did give me a —— cent; and he'll live longer than I will probably."

"If you don't keep your mouth shut," agreed Hoban dryly.

Harry laughed and went up to the ranch-house, while Omaha and Hoban began packing their war-sacks.

It did not take Allenby and Clayton long to make the drive to Moolock, and they were greeted at Elk saloon with the information that Seeley had died. The doctor wanted some information regarding this man, in order to notify his relatives; and Swan River Smith wanted some information regarding him, to use at the inquest.

Allenby knew nothing about him, except what Clayton had told him; and Clayton's information was almost as vague. He knew that Seeley was a detective—a cattle detective—but he did not know where Seeley's relatives lived.

Swan River Smith went back to his office, where Forty Dollar, Hashknife and Sleepy were playing seven-up at two bits a corner, and told them what Clayton had told him regarding the dead man.

"Name is Seeley, and he was a cattle detective, eh?" mused Hashknife. "It kinda looks to me like his profession reacted upon him. Mebbe he wore a star, or somethin' that advertised his callin'."

"That's why Allenby told me to keep out of it," grinned Swan River. He sobered in a moment, shutting one eye, as he considered the situation.

"I'll tell yuh, it ain't so much of a joke, at that," he said. "Murder is murder, by golly. That Seeley was shot from behind; and it ain't noways healthy nor conductive of pleasant thoughts to think that there might be a killer behind the next bush."

"Looks to me like it might be a warnin'," observed Forty Dollar. "I sure believe in them kinda signs. I've had my fortune told five times, altogether. Had 'em told by a different person every time—and every fortune was different. Doggone it, yuh never know who to believe.

"One of 'em told me to beware of a tall, dark man; another told me that I was goin' to have a lot of trouble with a light complected man, and the rest of 'em dilated on trouble with three other kinds of men. And they all was different. If I tried to run my existence accordin' to their warnin's, I'd have to hide out in the hills. Whooee! I sure have got a lot of mixed sizes and colors tryin' to make life hard for me."

"I never had my fortune told," said Swan River. "I'd a lot rather get along in my own dumb way. I don't want to know what is jist around the next turn; but I'd sure like to have just a little inside information on who is doin' this dirty work.

"We'll have to hold this inquest tomorrow and shove that poor —— under the sod without knowin' anythin' more about him. Clayton, the cattle buyer, hired him for Allenby; but Clayton don't know where Seeley's relatives live."

A WHILE they were talking, Doctor Edwall, the coroner, came in. He was a fussy, little man, partly bald, and talked jerkily.

"Very little information to be had," he declared. "Clayton knows very little. No known relatives. Came here from Omaha, Nebraska. Pockets yielded very little. Nothing worth while. Here—" he handed the sheriff a soiled envelope—"that is a letter to Seeley, written, I presume, by Mr. Clayton. I have read it."

Swan River Smith took the letter out of the envelop and read it carefully. Swan River did not read very fast. Finally he placed it on his desk.

"Well, that don't give us much information, doctor," he decided. "We'll just have to go ahead and hold the inquest, bring in the usual verdict, and bury the corpse, I reckon."

"Yes, yes, I suppose so, sheriff. Well, good-by, gentlemen."

The doctor bustled away, as busy as a bee. Hashknife picked up the letter and looked it over. It had been sent from Moolock, and was directed to Jim Seeley, Omaha, Nebraska, care of general delivery. The letter read:

> DEAR JIM:
>
> Frank Allenby, the biggest cattleman in Moolock, is up against a very dangerous proposition and needs help. It looks like a plain case of spite work by somebody and you can make five thousand dollars for a few days work.
>
> This gang of rustlers are able to pull off big jobs and get away without the slightest chance of any one detecting them. Your work must be done without any one knowing who you are; *sabe?*
>
> I will explain everything to you when you get here. You will like Allenby. If you can't take this job, Jim, it will disappoint me greatly. If you come, keep it dark or it might make things very bad. Wire your decision. Sincerely
>
> ED.

"Well, Allenby's life is still worth the five thousand, I reckon," smiled Hashknife, as he handed the letter back to the sheriff. "Mebbe he'll raise the ante after awhile."

"Speak about the ——," muttered Forty Dollar.

Allenby was entering the office as Forty Dollar spoke, but he could hardly have heard what Hashknife said. Allenby was trying his best to be pleasant as he greeted all of them. He sat down and fanned himself with his hat.

"Going to hold the inquest tomorrow?" he asked the sheriff.

"Yeah, tomorrow," nodded the sheriff. "Probably want you to testify, Allenby. It won't amount to anythin'; but it's accordin' to law."

"Certainly," agreed Allenby warmly. "I wish I could give you more information regarding this man Seeley; but I knew nothing about him. There is no question but what he was murdered."

"Well," said Swan River slowly, "I never knowed a man to shoot himself twice in the back with a rifle. I suppose there is some of them con-tor-shunists that might shoot themselves once in the back; but I'll betcha that a thirty-thirty would sure take the kink out of 'em real quick. No, I reckon we've got to look the facts square in the face and admit that Seeley was shot with malice aforethought and a high-powered rifle."

"Mm-m-m-m," muttered Allenby.

Swan River's face was so serious that Allenby wasn't quite sure whether Swan River was joking or not. He decided to drop the subject; so he turned to Hashknife and said—

"I was just wondering if you two cowboys were looking for work."

Hashknife grinned widely.

"You might change that question to read, 'lookin' for jobs,' and get us to nod our heads."

Allenby forced a laugh.

"I suppose it's just as well to be honest about it," he said. "There will probably be two vacancies on my ranch, and you two can have the jobs, if you care to take them."

"Hoban and Omaha quittin'?" asked Forty Dollar.

"Well, it amounts to that. I shall make Harry foreman, I think. He needs responsibility."

"He sure as —— needs somethin'," grinned Swan River.

Allenby's lips formed a hot retort, but he curbed his feelings. He knew that there was nothing to gain in quarreling with the sheriff; so he shut his lips and waited for Hashknife to decide.

"Forty a month?" asked Sleepy.

"Yes."

The forty dollars per month did not appeal to Sleepy, but he was willing to leave the decision to Hashknife, who was thinking deeply over the offer.

"Well," he said slowly, "I suppose we might take it. It ain't none of my business, but I'd like to know why yore foreman and the other man are quittin' yuh."

Allenby's expression indicated that it was none of Hashknife's business, but he replied evenly—

"They are leaving the Half-Circle Cross because they would not obey orders."

"Yeah? Well, mebbe we won't obey 'em either, Allenby. But if you want to take that chance—we're willin', eh, Sleepy?"

"We can always quit," said Sleepy indifferently.

"Well, that is settled," said Allenby, with a certain amount of satisfaction, as he got up and started for the door. "You will be out to the ranch today?"

"Before supper time," said Hashknife.

A few minutes later Omaha and Hoban rode into town, with their war-sack, containing their belongings, tied to the back of their saddles. Allenby met them on the street and paid what was due on their salaries.

Clayton was not going back to the ranch; so Allenby left town alone.

"What did yuh take these jobs for?"

asked Sleepy, as he and Hashknife saddled their horses at the sheriff's stable.

"Just a fool notion thasall," said Hashknife seriously.

"All right," Sleepy retorted grudgingly. "Forty a month, and take orders from some kid."

"We ain't took no orders from him yet, Sleepy."

"That's true. I'd kinda like to know what kind of orders he passed out to them other two hired men."

"Wait and see," advised Hashknife. "We'll likely find out."

About a mile out of town they overtook Allenby, who had driven off the side of the road and was waiting for them.

"I didn't want to say too much there in town," he told them. "Freeman told me your names at the time he spoke about me hiring you; so I know you are the same men. I think I need your help now more than I did before, and I just want to say that I'm still willling to pay you the sum of five thousand dollars for evidence that will convict those who have been stealing my stock.

"The men who have been stealing my stock are the same ones that killed Seeley. A conviction for rustling will fasten the murder on them also. For some reason or other, it appears that we have been working at cross purposes. I think you know what I mean."

"Don't reckon I do," said Hashknife thoughtfully.

"That matter concerning the pinto and gray horse."

"Oh, yeah. I heard the sheriff sayin' somethin' about it. What was it all about, Allenby?"

Allenby studied Hashknife and Sleepy for several moments. Sleepy's expression was as innocent as that of a child, while Hashknife's was merely indifferent, as he carefully shaped a cigaret and struck a match with his thumb nail.

"Well," said Allenby dubiously, "perhaps—but it doesn't matter."

He spoke sharply to the team, which surged back into the road, and the two cowboys followed leisurly behind him.

"He's still got that five thousand," laughed Hashknife.

"Yeah, and he can keep it," said Sleepy. "I don't want no thirty-thirty bullets between my shoulders, y'betcha."

* * *

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy did not go to Moolock the next day. Allenby and his son left early, as they were not sure what time the inquest was to be held. They gave no orders to Hashknife and Sleepy. Allenby told them to get used to the ranch, and to take it easy for their first day.

The two cowboys had instinctively liked Mrs. Allenby, a quiet little woman. June had colored slightly during her introduction to Hashknife as she recognized him, and wondered if he had remembered her meeting with Bud Bell.

Sleepy did not like the Half-Circle Cross ranch buildings.

"Ain't noways homelike," he complained. "Makes yuh feel like yo're civilized. Even the bunk-house door don't squeak. By golly, I'd put some sand into them hinges if I stayed here long. Carpet on the bunk-house floor and a re-cep-tickle for cigaret butts!"

"It sure is kinda dude-like," admitted Hashknife. "But you have to excuse Allenby; he's from the city. If he runs cows long enough he'll develop squeaky hinges, bare floors and weather-beaten exteriors."

About an hour after Harry and his father left the ranch, June asked Hashknife if he would saddle her horse. She rode a racy-looking little sorrel, a swell-fork saddle; and her riding clothes consisted of a divided skirt, flannel shirt, cowboy boots and a floppy sombrero.

"*Mucho buena!*" exclaimed Sleepy softly, as she rode away.

"That's right," agreed Hashknife.

They watched until she disappeared in the hills to the east. There was nothing for them to do except to loaf around.

The inquest at Moolock caused a certain amount of interest, and there was quite a crowd present. Allenby admitted that Seeley was a detective, hired for him by Clayton, the cattle-buyer. Clayton said he had met Seeley a number of times, and knew that Seeley was a man of ability. The sheriff produced and read Clayton's letter to Seeley, which had been among Seeley's effects; and the hastily picked coroner's jury brought in a verdict that Seeley had been shot in the back by a party or parties unknown.

There was considerable discussion among the cattlemen, following the inquest. They had ignored Allenby's statements regarding the number of cattle he had lost lately; but they were forced to admit that it was serious enough to cause a man to get shot in the back.

Neither Hank nor Bud Bell were in town. It might have complicated matters a little, as it was well known that there was bad blood between them and Allenby. The inquest was held about two o'clock in the afternoon, and at about three o'clock the stage from White Eagle, thirty miles away, came into town, with the driver, "Shorty" Elkins, sitting straight in the seat, hanging on with both hands, and with the lines twisted around one foot and held between his knees.

The team went past the stage station, caught the right front wheel into the post of a hitch-rack and jerked to a sudden stop; so sudden that Shorty pitched off over the wheel and fell against the sidewalk, where he stayed until some of the men picked him up.

They straightened him out on the sidewalk and some one poured a drink of whisky between his white lips.

"My gosh!" exploded Larry Neil, an Arrowhead cowboy, "somebody has sure riddled poor Shorty. Somebody get the doctor."

Swan River Smith arrived, as did Allenby and Clayton. Another drink of whisky, forced between Shorty's lips, seemed to revive him enough to open his eyes.

"How are yuh, Shorty?" asked Swan River. "Can yuh tell us what happened to yuh?"

Shorty's eyes were filming, but he was conscious. He tried to lift his hand, but the effort was too much. Several times he twisted his lips, trying to speak. Then—

"June—Allenby——"

He managed to speak her name, spacing it widely.

"What about her, Shorty?" asked Swan River anxiously. "Try it again, son."

"She—" He spoke the one word, tried to say more, but was unable to open his mouth again.

"Shorty's dead," said Swan River softly, getting to his feet.

Fred Hartwell, owner of the stage line, forced his way to the center and looked down at the dead man who had been his driver. Swan River told him all they knew about it, and they watched Hartwell as he examined the contents of the stage.

"The treasure box is gone," he said. "We won't know how much has been stolen until we check up with the office at White Eagle."

The doctor arrived, and after a short examination shook his head, as he listened to a description of how the stage had arrived.

"I don't see how he lived that long," declared the doctor. "He must have fought hard against it."

"But what did he mean about my daughter?" asked Allenby anxiously. "What could he have meant?"

"She wasn't on the stage today, was she?" asked the sheriff.

"No. She was at home when I left there." Allenby whirled and ran to his buckboard.

"Some of us better ride to the Half-Circle Cross," said the sheriff quickly. "Shorty had that girl on his mind for some reason. Dang it, why didn't he live longer!"

Swan River bowlegged his way swiftly toward his stable, with Forty Dollar right at his heels; while several of the cowboys mounted and waited for the sheriff to ride with them. But far ahead of them went the team of cream colored bronchos, running at top speed, while the lurching buckboard threatened at any time to capsize and throw Allenby and Clayton out into the sagebrush.

Hashknife and Sleepy were in the bunk-house when the cavalcade arrived. The horsemen had almost overtaken the team, and when the two cowboys came outside the yard was filled with riders. Allenby fairly fell out of the buckboard and ran to Hashknife.

"Is June home?" he panted.

Hashknife shook his head.

"No, she ain't. About an hour after you left this mornin', she had me saddle her horse, and she rode away. I don't reckon she's come back yet. What's the matter?"

Allenby groaned aloud and turned to the sheriff.

"She went riding," he said blankly.

"That's all right," said Swan River. "Which way did she go?

"Went east from here," said Hashknife, pointing in that direction.

"Straight toward the White Eagle road," said a cowboy softly.

"We'll spread out and comb that country," said the sheriff. "Maybe we can find her."

Allenby ran toward the house, where Mrs. Allenby had come out on the porch, wondering at the crowd of riders, while the sheriff told Hashknife about Shorty Elkins.

"He tried to tell us about her," said Swan River sadly. "Somethin' has happened to her, that's a cinch."

"Shucks, this is a civilized country," said Pete Sepulveda. "I dunno what could happen to a girl around here."

"Two men have been murdered this week," reminded Swan River grimly, and several of the men growled audibly.

Hashknife and Sleepy ran to the stable and saddled their horses, while others helped Allenby and Clayton saddle suitable mounts.

It was not over fifteen minutes later that they rode out of the ranch yard, spread out fan-wise and headed east. Hashknife and Sleepy were the last ones to see her; so they headed for the spot where she had disappeared.

About six miles from the ranch they struck the road to White Eagle, which ran north and south. It was here that the riders drew together, searching for the spot where the stage had been held up. The roadbed was so hard that it was impossible to distinguish anything out of the ordinary; so the searchers split into two parties, going in opposite directions.

Hashknife and Sleepy joined Swan River Smith, going toward Moolock, and they were the ones to find the spot. It was in a timbered swale, where a small stream trickled down across the road. The signs were fairly plain here. The stage had swerved half-off the road into softer ground.

To the west of the road a deep cattle trail wound down the swale, where the timber would mask it from the road. Hashknife discovered the trail, and in it were the fresh imprints of a shod horse.

"She came down that trail," he told the sheriff, pointing out the tracks. "They picked a dandy place for the job, too. It kinda looks like she busted right into the holdup, without knowin' it was takin' place. She couldn't see the road until she came out through them bushes, and they likely seen her first."

"Yeah, it looks thataway, Hartley," agreed Swan River. "Mebbe they had to do somethin' to save themselves, don'tcha see? If it was somebody she knew—well, it kinda put 'em up against it."

Hashknife examined the tracks closely, squatting on his heels. Swan River turned around to take another look at the trail, and Hashknife suddenly reached down, picked up a tiny object and put it in his pocket.

"Where'll we go now?" he asked Swan River.

"The Lord only knows," confessed the sheriff. "There's no way to track 'em. I've heard about savages bein' able to foller a trail where there wasn't any—but I'm no savage. Dang it all, that's the worst of bein' a sheriff. Everybody expects him to be wise as —— and with a nose like a bloodhound."

"Might as well wait for the rest of the gang to come," said Hashknife. "They'll be bustin' back this way soon. It was a cinch that Shorty Elkins didn't drive an awful long ways, shot up thataway."

THEY rolled cigarets and mused silently. There were no clues to work on. They had found where the stage had been stopped; but it had done them no good, as far as clues were concerned. It was possibly half-an-hour before the other riders arrived, and Hashknife showed Allenby what had happened at that spot.

Allenby listened dumbly, nodding his head; like a man who is too sick to talk.

"You think then that she was merely captured to prevent her from exposing the bandits?" queried Clayton.

"That's about the only way to look at it," said Hashknife. "Men don't steal girls these days. It just ain't done. I don't know this country like some of yuh do," Hashknife turned to the crowd, "If any of you was goin' to steal a girl, where would yuh hide her?"

No one replied. Allenby stared dumbly ahead of him, his jaw shut tightly.

"I dunno where to look," confessed Swan River. "It's likely the same gang that held up the train."

Allenby turned quickly and stared at the sheriff.

"The same two?" he said wearily. "Why—sure." He turned and mounted his horse.

"Where are you goin'?" asked Swan River quickly.

Allenby picked up his reins, adjusted his belt.

"I'm going to kill the men who own a black headed pinto and a gray horse," he said coldly. "I'm going, if I have to go alone."

"Hank Bell," said Forty Dollar Dion softly.

"Let's talk about it a little,'" advised Swan River. "They——"

"They wasn't in town today," interrupted Larry Neil.

"Neither were we," said Hashknife, indicating himself and Sleepy.

"They've been stealing from me for over two years," said Allenby grimly. "I helped to send Bud to the penitentiary. Hank Bell swore he'd get even with me. Their last steal was when they took three hundred Herefords from the Moolock loading pens.

"I hired a detective and they killed him—shot him in the back. The sheriff can't deny that he thinks they robbed that train. He chased them to Tecoma, where they stole Hartley's and Stevens' horses, leaving the pinto and gray in their stead. If they'd steal my cattle, rob trains—is there any reason why they wouldn't rob a stage—and steal my girl?"

"Why sit here and argue about it?" asked Harry Allenby. "Let's go over to the HB and have it out with them."

"Allenby's argument looks —— plausible to me," stated Merton. "It's worth workin' on, ain't it?"

"Worth workin' on—but it ain't worth killin' on," said Swan River. "It's awful easy to make mistakes."

"Well, I'm going down there," declared Allenby. "If I have to go alone, I'll go anyway. I'm going to find June."

"That's fine," said Hashknife. "We're all lookin' for her, Allenby, but we ain't on no killin' spree. If I'm any judge of humanity, Hank, Bud and that Sticky Clay *sabe* shootin'-irons. If we go down there, huntin' for trouble, I'll bet we find it. What do you fellers think?"

"I don't care what they think!" exclaimed Allenby. "I'm going!"

"Wait a minute," begged Clayton. "Hartley is right, Allenby. Right now you are in no frame of mind to go there. You know that those three men are dangerous. You are not a gunman. You wouldn't have one chance in a thousand with them. No, you can't get June back with a six-shooter."

"You are all against me," mourned Allenby pettishly. "Don't you want me to get my daughter back?"

"Don't be a —— baby!" snorted Hashknife. "This is no time for hysterics."

Harry shoved his horse close to Hashknife.

"You let up on that stuff," he ordered. "You can't come in here and tell us what to do."

Hashknife grinned at Harry and the boy's face flushed hotly.

"Back up, you —— fool!" snorted Forty Dollar. "If you don't keep yore mouth shut, Harry, somebody is goin' to hit you so hard they'll uncork yuh."

Harry turned in his saddle and glared at Forty Dollar.

"By ——, I don't have to take things like that!" he blurted.

"No, yuh don't have to," said Forty Dollar quietly. "If you've got any good ideas on how to handle this situation, yuh might step up and disgorge 'em. If yuh ain't—shut up."

"There's a lot of truth in that," agreed Clayton.

"Oh, go to ——!" Harry was sufficiently squelched to draw his horse back, but his face was black with rage.

The sun was just going down behind the hills, and they all knew that there was little daylight left to work in.

"If Hartley is right in his surmise, I don't think that June will be injured in any way," said Clayton. "I don't think it is a situation that can be handled by force of arms. If we were lucky enough to blunder into them, it is hard to tell what they might do to keep her from exposing them."

"That sounds like sense," agreed Hashknife heartily. "This thing is not going to be easy to handle, nor is it a mob job."

"What would you suggest?" asked Allenby. He seemed more at ease now.

"I'd suggest that we go home. Mebbe the girl wasn't caught at all. We kinda went off half-cocked, just because a dyin' man spoke her name. We don't know for sure, don'tcha see?"

"That's true," agreed Allenby, willing to grasp at any straw.

"I wonder if that isn't true?" Thus Clayton, visibly relieved.

"Let's look at it thataway," sggested Swan River. "Tomorrow is another day."

After a few minutes of conversation, Hashknife, Sleepy, Harry and his father, left the road and went back toward the ranch, while the rest of the searchers went on toward Moolock. Hashknife and Sleepy lagged back during that ride across the hills.

"You ain't hopin' to see her at home, are yuh?" queried Sleepy.

"Hopin' thasall," said Hashknife. "We had to bust up that argument someway, Sleepy. It's a cinch that June got grabbed. Just who got her is a mystery. Me and you are goin' to Moolock after supper."

But June was not at the ranch. Allenby's spirits went down below zero. He had evidently expected to find her there. Mrs. Allenby seemed very patient. She was not the kind of woman to show great emotion. Harry came down to the bunk-house, where Hashknife and Sleepy were getting ready for supper, and apologized for what he had said.

"I'm sorry," he said contritely. "That argument got on my nerves."

"Thasall right," grinned Hashknife. "Mebbe I'd 'a' done the same thing. Just forget it, Harry."

"Well, I'm glad yuh feel that way about it," said Harry. "Dad seems to have great faith in you two."

Hashknife smiled softly, as he hung up his towel.

"Faith is a great thing, Harry," he said. "If folks ever have faith in yuh—don't ruin it. This whole world is built on faith. Yuh can go a long ways, if yuh have faith in yoreself; but the minute yuh lose faith in yoreself—yo're done. And yo're done, when others lose faith in yuh."

"Are you a preacher?" asked Harry, a trifle sarcastically.

"A preacher?" Hashknife squinted thoughtfully. "No-o-o, I'm not a preacher, Harry. Mebbe I'm my brother's keeper."

"What's that?"

"Did you ever read the Bible?"

"No. I'm not religious."

Hashknife smiled.

"What is religion, Harry?"

"I dunno. Lot of —— Bible-backs, I reckon."

Harry turned away and went out of the bunk-house. Sleepy grinned at Hashknife and said—

"Shall we sing a hymn before supper, cowboy?"

Hashknife squinted seriously, as the cook hammered on the triangle at the kitchen door, calling them to supper.

"No," he said slowly, "I don't think we'll sing, Sleepy. A little prayer might be a lot better."

"A prayer for who, Hashknife—us?"

"It all depends on what's in the Big Book, pardner. Let's eat."

"So it's come all ye punchers,
Put yore belly to the bar
And drink a fare-ye-well,
'Cause I'm goin' mighty far,
With a whang de oodle addy aye."

THUS sang Lem Elder, a tall, weary-looking cowboy, who worked for Sam Bass, of the 27A outfit, as he rested his elbows on the White Horse saloon bar.

Pete Sepulveda was sitting on a card table, chin in hands, but now he looked up reprovingly at Lem.

"Yuh hadn't ought to sing, Lem," he said. "Songs ain't appreciated in Moolock tonight. Yuh know, they ain't found that girl yet."

"That's right," nodded Lem. "Excuse me. That —— whisky they sell here makes yuh sing. Is anybody huntin' for her, Pete?"

"Not now, I guess. Allenby and his bunch went home. Wasn't much they could do in the dark."

"I seen Harry and them two strange punchers ride in a while ago." Thus Pinon Meade, another of Sam Bass' men. Pinon was small of stature, but wide of shoulder. He had been so nicknamed from his fondness for pinon nuts.

"That's Hartley and Stevens," offered Pete. "They took the place of Omaha and Chet Hoban at the Half-Circle Cross."

"Hoban and Olsen get fired?" queried Lem.

"Yesterday. Had a run-in with Allenby. They're still here in town. They're two danged good cow-hands."

"Where did Hartley and Stevens come from?" asked Pinon.

"I dunno. Just drifted in, I suppose."

"Good cow-hands?"

"I'll betcha they are."

Harry Allenby came in, his face flushed with drink, and set up the drinks to the three cowboys.

"Any news?" queried Pete.

"Not a thing," replied Harry, glancing toward the door. "Bud Bell is in town."

"Alone?" asked Pete.

"The old man and Sticky Clay are with him."

"Put yore troubles in yore war-bag," advised Pete meaningly.

"You think I'm afraid of them?" Harry drained his glass and flipped it back on the bar. He was drunk enough to be reckless.

"I would be," said Lem Elder seriously.

"——, you fellers make me tired! I'll get 'em one at a time."

Pinon Meade laughed and walked out of the place. Harry's eyes snapped angrily. The strong liquor was percolating through his veins, taking away what little judgment he might have had. He rubbed the palm of his right hand on the butt of his revolver, and his lips screwed into a sneering grin. His nose and upper lip were still swollen a little, and he did not look pretty.

He did not notice that Pete and Lem had stepped away from him, nor that the bartender had moved quietly toward the other end of the bar. He was facing the door, squinting at the floor, and now he looked up to see Sticky Clay framed in the doorway.

Harry blinked, as though not believing his eyes. Clay did not move. Then Harry swayed away from the bar, his right hand streaking for his gun. Harry was fast with his draw, but not fast enough. The experienced gun-man in the doorway, flipped his hand forward, fired almost from his hip. Clay's draw was almost too fast for the eye to follow. Harry took a half-step backward, dropped his gun and fell forward on his face, arms outspread. For several moments Clay leaned forward, watching him. Then he straightened up, snapped his gun back in the holster and spoke to Pete—

"You saw this, Pete?"

Pete nodded quickly.

"Yeah, we all seen it, Sticky."

"Lookin' for it, wasn't he, Pete?"

"Yeah, he was."

"Got it, didn't he?"

Pete nodded.

"Everybody satisfied then," Sticky Clay turned and disappeared. Pete and Lem turned Harry over, expecting to find him dead; but he was far from it. The heavy bullet had scored along his head from the left temple to his left ear, where it had taken the top of his ear off cleanly. He was bleeding freely, but recovering nicely from the shock. An inch farther to the right, and Harry Allenby would have been a casualty.

They helped him into a chair and bound his head in a none-too-clean handkerchief. The report of the gun had caused the curious to go searching for its cause, with the result that Harry was soon surrounded, and the White Horse saloon began doing a good business.

Swan River Smith investigated, and nodded over Pete Sepulveda's story; while Hashknife and Sleepy listened closely.

"He was lookin' for trouble, Swan River," said Pete. "I don't blame Clay a —— bit. Harry started his draw first."

"And that settles it," said the sheriff. "As long as it was an even break."

Some one had gone after the doctor, who bandaged Harry, in spite of Harry's protests that he did not need any attention.

"You let him do it," said Clayton. "If you don't have it fixed up now, you'll be marked for life. You're lucky."

The shock had sobered Harry, and he had nothing to say. Hashknife and Sleepy crossed the street to the general merchandise store, where they found Hank and Bud Bell. Bud nodded to them. Several men were in the store, talking about the missing girl and about the stage robbery. Hashknife bought some tobacco and began rolling a cigaret, when he saw Bud Bell signal him to come outside.

Bud sauntered out and in a few moments Hashknife followed him. Sleepy had seen the signal to Hashknife, but did not go with him. Bud had walked down the sidewalk out of the lights, and Hashknife joined him.

"Hartley," he said, without any preliminaries, "I want you to tell me all about this. I've heard several tales, but they are all different."

"Mebbe mine is, too," said Hashknife. "Anyway, here's how it looked from my my knot-hole."

He told Bud all he knew about the shooting of Shorty Elkins and the disappearance of June Allenby. Bud did not interrupt. He told Bud his conclusions regarding the reasons for June's disappearance.

"Thank yuh, Hartley," he said. "Do you remember 'Slim' Stout?"

"Slim Stout?" Hashknife took the cigaret out of his mouth and nodded slowly. "Yeah, I do. I sent him to the pen."

"That's where I met him, Hartley. He told me about you."

"Thasso?"

"Yes. He's still got five years before he can look for a parole or a pardon. He says you let him off easy."

"Shell stuck in my gun," said Hashknife. "Slim didn't know it, I reckon."

Bud laughed shortly.

"Slim didn't tell it that way."

"Likely lied to yuh. Now listen, Bell; as friend to friend, I want to warn yuh. Things are gettin' hotter every minute. Allenby has piled up evidence enough to hang a king—that is, outside the law. Sticky Clay and Harry Allenby just tried to kill each other a while ago, as you know. Allenby didn't get hurt much."

"As friend to friend?" said Bud wonderingly.

"Somethin' like that."

"Why? Was it you who turned those two horses loose?"

"I needed the stable space," lied Hashknife.

"Yeah? And now yo're workin' for Allenby?"

"Externally."

"Why are you takin' an interest in me, Hartley?"

"I dunno. Why does the wind blow? Ask me somethin' easy. Now you take my advice and don't go to sleep. I know that all three of you are able to get along without crutches; but yuh can't buck the whole county. I'm doin' all I can, Bell. If they hang yuh, that won't help me much —nor you either. I'm goin' to sneak out to see yuh just as soon as I can."

"Thanks, Hartley."

"Don't thank me."

HASHKNIFE turned and walked across the street to the Elk saloon, leaving Bud alone to think it over. More men were coming in to town. Bud walked back to the store, signaled to his father, and together they got their horses. They knew that Sticky had gone home after the shooting, to prevent complications which were bound to ensue, if he stayed in town.

"Things look kinda cranky, Bud," observed the old man.

"Yeah, and I'm afraid they'll get worse, Dad. Stealin' a girl is bad business. There's a lot of talk and a lot of whisky in Moolock tonight; so we better keep out of sight. I wish Sticky had kept away from Harry Allenby; but Harry was lookin' for it, and Clay is always willin' to accommodate. They tell me that Harry started the draw first."

"Young Allenby is a fool to draw with Clay," observed the old man. "What did that tall cowpuncher want, Bud?"

"Wanted to give me some advice."

"He's workin' for Allenby, ain't he?"

"Yeah."

"Well, we don't need any advice from that —— outfit."

"This didn't come from the outfit, Dad. If it ever comes to a showdown, don't hurt that tall puncher. And if he asks yuh to do somethin'—do it."

"Who in —— is he, Bud?"

"He turned the pinto and gray out of Swan River's stable."

"But he's workin' for Allenby, Bud."

"Yeah. I don't *sabe* it, but I'm willin' to foller his advice."

While the Bell family rode homeward, Hashknife went to the White Horse saloon. Harry Allenby was still there, but fairly sober now. His head was bandaged and he was unable to wear his hat. Swan River took Hashknife aside and imparted the information that there was too much talk, mixed with whisky, to suit him.

"This girl-stealin' has worked everybody up to a pitch," he declared. "Dang it, they'll ruin everythin' if they start out on a rampage. I've done a lot of talkin', and I've kinda got some of 'em sore at me. Are Bud and Hank still in town?"

"Just left a few minutes ago," said Hashknife. "I think Clay left just after the shootin'."

More men came into the saloon. Hashknife and Swan River sat down at a vacant card table near the rear of the room, where they could watch the place. Harry Allenby was drinking again, and seemed to parade his bandages, talking loudly.

"Swan River, have you still got that letter —the one that Seeley had in his pocket?" asked Hashknife.

The sheriff drew it out of an inside pocket and handed it to Hashknife, who spread it out on the table. For several minutes he studied it closely, squinting away from the smoke of his cigaret. He was about to fold it up, when something caused him to look at it again.

After concentrating on it for a space of time he looked up at Swan River, a grin widening his mouth.

"What's funny in that letter?" asked Swan River.

"Nothin'," grinned Hashknife. "I was

just thinkin' about somethin' else. Mind if I keep this letter?"

Swan River shook his head, "It ain't of no use to me."

Forty Dollar came in and walked straight to their table. Forty was serious as he sat down.

"Somethin' is goin' to bust pretty soon," he declared. "Over at the Elk, they're talkin' too much to suit me. Some son-of-a-gun has told about them two horses, and a few of the gang wants to know if the sheriff's office is standin' in with the robbers."

Swan River's jaw clamped tightly and he got to his feet.

"I'll answer their —— questions," he rasped, and started for the door. Clayton was coming in, and they almost collided. Clayton's sleeve was torn and he had the general appearance of one who had been fighting.

He stepped away from the sheriff and went to the bar, where he drank alone, turned with his back against the bar and looked around the room.

"Kinda looks like friend Clayton had been fightin'," observed Forty Dollar.

Forty's observation was punctuated with a *zz-zwhap!"* Clayton's shoulders thudded back against the bar and Hashknife went sidewise out of his chair, while from outside came the report of a shot.

Clayton ducked, putting the end of the bar between himself and the open doorway, while the rest of the crowd scattered to get out of line. For several moments Clayton clawed at his shirt front. The bullet had burned across his chest, tearing a shallow furrow, but doing little damage; after which it passed within a short distance of Hashknife's head and thudded into the rear wall.

"Hurt yuh much?" asked Hashknife.

Clayton shook his head, sprang to his feet and ran out through the rear entrance. Disregarding a possible second shot, Hashknife and Forty Dollar ran out through the front doorway and into the street. It was too dark, beyond the front window illumination, for them to see any one.

Swan River came running from the Elk saloon, followed by several men, who had heard the shot. But the shooter had made himself scarce. Hashknife drew Swan River aside and together they made the rounds of the saloons, checking up on the cowboys As far as they were able to find out, no one was missing, except Clayton.

"Do yuh reckon they was tryin' to kill you or Clayton?" asked Sleepy, who joined them at the Elk.

"That's hard to tell, Sleepy. We'll figure it was Clayton. He'd had trouble with somebody just before that shot was fired. If we can find Clayton, mebbe he'll tell who it was—if he knows."

But they were unable to find Clayton; so Swan River opined that Clayton was hiding out. The folks of Moolock town were getting plenty of food for conversation. Hashknife was curious about the trouble between Harry Allenby and Sticky Clay; so he found Pete Sepulveda and asked him about it.

"Harry was lookin' for it," explained Pete, a trifle thickly. "Pinon Meade, Lem Elder, me and Harry was there in the saloon, when Harry got to makin' his war-talk. Pinon pulled out and in a few seconds we happens to see Sticky in the doorway.

"Harry don't see him for a while, yuh see. Pretty soon he looks up and sees Sticky. They look at each other about a second and Harry breaks for his gun. Sticky makes his draw, shoots from his hip, and Harry falls on his nose. Sticky thinks he's killed Harry, I reckon; but he ain't excited. It was an even break, thassall."

"Much obliged, Pete," said Hashknife thoughtfully. "Has there ever been any trouble between Harry and Pinon Meade?"

"I don't reckon there has. Pinon ain't quarrelsome."

Hashknife drifted back to Swan River and Sleepy, where he found Frank Allenby, listening to Swan River tell about the gun battle between Harry and Sticky Clay. Allenby said little. He seemed to have aged greatly in the last few hours. Hashknife drew him aside.

"Has there ever been any trouble between you and Pinon Meade?" asked Hashknife.

"Not at all," replied Allenby. "Why do you ask?"

"Just wonderin', thassall. You heard about somebody shootin' at Clayton, haven't yuh?"

Allenby nodded quickly.

"Yes, but I do not understand it. I can't find Clayton anywhere. He is not at the hotel."

"There's a fly in the axle-grease somewhere," mused Hashknife.

"I don't know what to do," admitted Allenby. "—— knows, I can't stand it much longer. My wife just sits and looks at the wall. I wish she could cry. It helps a woman to cry, don't you think so, Hartley?"

"Not as much as it does to laugh, Allenby. I want to ask you a personal question: Is Clayton goin' to marry yore daughter?"

"What has that to do——?"

"I'm askin'—not answerin', Allenby."

"Suppose he is—what about it?"

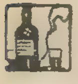
"Is there any one else who might want her bad enough to kill Clayton over her?"

Allenby took a deep breath and shut his jaw tightly for a moment. Then—

"Do you suppose that is why he tried to kill Clayton?"

"He? Who do you mean, Allenby?"

But Allenby refused to say. Harry went past them, his bandaged head visible in the weak light, and went into the Elk saloon. He staggered slightly, laughing loudly with the other men. Allenby left Hashknife and went into the saloon.



HASHKNIFE found Sleepy and together they went from place to place, listening to the general talk. It was mostly whisky conversation, and Hashknife did not feel that they were going to do anything rash. Later on he found Swan River, visibly relieved.

"I think everythin' will be all right," he told them. "I've talked with a few of them, includin' Allenby, and they've all agreed to wait until mornin'. I've promised to lead a posse out to the HB ranch after daylight. If they—well, I dunno. Dang it, I've done the best I could, Hartley."

"Nobody can say that yuh ain't been fair," agreed Hashknife.

"Mebbe I've been too fair, Hartley. Still, I discount everythin' that happens, when there's hate behind it. Christman hated old Hank Bell. Mebbe Allenby bought that hate along with the ranch."

"How did they happen to catch Bud Bell that time?" asked Hashknife.

"When they sent him to the penitentiary? That was a little over two years ago. Allenby and Clayton—Clayton had only been here a few months at that time—were ridin' through the hills, lookin' over the stock.

"They were over near Two Men Cañon when they caught a glimpse of a man, who kinda seemed to be misbrandin' a couple of critters. Had 'em roped and was heatin' his iron, I reckon. Anyway, he seen 'em, too; so he snaps out of the brush on his horse, and hits into the hills, with Allenby and Clayton after him.

"He sure led 'em a merry chase, I guess. Allenby and Clayton got separated, and after while they gives up the chase. Clayton circles back to the two roped animals, and is lookin' 'em over when Allenby gets back. They're both branded fresh with the HB iron, kinda rough-like, and where the Half-Circle Cross ought to be, is a big spot burned over with a hot dry-pan.

"The rustlers sure must 'a' been nervous to burn over that much space in ventin' an ordinary brand. The HB ain't very artistic, but there she is. That was all the evidence against Bud Bell. Old Hank couldn't 'a' done it, on account of bein' crippled—and Sticky Clay was in a poker game at the Elk all that afternoon, which was an alibi for him. So they sent Bud up for stealin' Half-Circle Cross stock."

"Didn't Bud have any defense at all?"

"How could he? Nobody would steal cattle for the HB. Yuh know, Bud used to wear one of them five-gallon sombreros, with a wide band, kinda studded with silver rosettes. Oh, yuh could see it a mile away, glistenin' in the sun. Anyway, both Allenby and Clayton testified that this rustler wore no hat. Allenby says he was sure the man had a hat when they seen him first, but that he was bareheaded when he made his getaway.

"Allenby says he was too excited to remember just what kind of a hat this man had on when they seen him first. But it kinda made things worse for Bud. He'd naturally hide the hat, 'cause it was so well known and easy to identify."

"And they didn't get close enough to identify him for sure?"

"Nope. But their evidence sure convinced the jury."

"The Half-Circle Cross brands on the right shoulder, and the HB on the right hip, don't they?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah. Bud sure vented a lot of space on the right shoulder of them two critters."

"No argument about 'em bein' Half-Circle Cross animals?"

"There might 'a' been, Hartley; but yuh could look real close and find the old scars of the original brand. They'd 'a' never showed up after a few days, when the new burn healed. No, there was no question about 'em bein' Allenby's stock."

"And the vented spot was bigger than the old brand, eh?"

"——, yes; four or five times as big."

"Uh-huh," Hashknife grew thoughtful. "And yuh think there's no danger of anybody doin' anythin' rash tonight, Sheriff?"

"Nope. They'll likely drink a lot of liquor and kinda gird up their loins, but that's about all. Will yuh ride out to the HB with us in the mornin'?"

"Very likely. I reckon we'll go back to the ranch and get a little sleep now."

Sleepy complained about leaving Moolock. It looked to Sleepy as though there might be trouble, and he did not want to miss any of it. He grumbled audibly, but rode out of town with Hashknife.

"I s'pose," he said sarcastically," that old folks like you have got to have their sleep, Hashknife."

"You betcha," agreed Hashknife. "Do you know the way to the HB ranch?"

"I can find it, Hashknife. "You—say, what's the idea?"

"Goin' visitin, Sleepy. Folks ought to be neighborly, hadn't they?"

"The road runs kinda south-east; so we better swing to the left. What are we goin' to do out there? Didn't Swan River say that he was——"

"Goin' out there after daylight," agreed Hashknife. "That's the trouble with the ordinary sheriff, Sleepy—they want to make a parade out of it. They never find out anythin'."

"What do you expect to find out, cowboy?"

"Parder, yuh never know what to expect. Anyway, we're goin' out thataway and see what we'll see. Probably won't see anythin'—mebbe we will."

"Uh-huh." Dubiously. "What was the idea of all them questions about Bud stealin' cows and gettin' sent to the pen?"

"Morbid curiosity, Sleepy. I just love to hear about grief and misery."

"Oh, go to ——!" snorted Sleepy.

"Very likely—if there is such a place. Sleepy."

It was about seven miles to the HB ranch from Moolock. The road wound through the hills, with little regard for grades; a strange road to the two cowboys, who only knew that somewhere along it was the HB ranch-house. In fact, at the end of it was the ranch, as it did not extend beyond.

There was no room yet, but the ribbon of road was easy to follow. The last few miles they rode silently, only the muffled sound of the horses in the dust to tell of their coming. The HB ranch buildings stood in the wide flat at the mouth of a cañon, and their silhouette was plainly visible from the road, which approached from a lower level.

No lights were visible, but Hashknife felt that somewhere around that black bulk of buildings some one was watching. They dismounted and led their horses away from the road into a clump of trees, which would screen them from any one passing on the way to or from the ranch.

"Got to get higher," said Hashknife, as he led the way out of the trees, keeping well away from the ranch, circling toward a rise of ground back of the stable. They were forced to proceed at a slow pace for fear of running into loose barb wire or other unknown difficulties.

At last they reached a point where they could look down on the group of buildings, and here they sat down to wait. It was well after midnight when they reached this point, and an hour later there was sufficient moonlight to enable them to distinguish something of the buildings and general contour of the surrounding country.

FOR a long time there was no sound, except the soft bawling of a cow in the corral. Far out in the hills a coyote called mournfully, and from the house came the short bark and growl of a dog. Then all was still again. Hour after hour went past, while the two cowboys huddled in the sage, unmoving, and worst of all, unsmoking.

The false dawn lighted the hills, and a chill wind swept down the cañon, causing the two cowboys to sink lower into the protecting brush. Suddenly Hashknife sat up. The dim figure of a man had crossed the corral and faded into the shadows of the stable.

"Didja see him?" asked Hashknife softly.

"Yeah," Sleepy shivered. "He went into the stable. Probably one of the HB outfit doin' his chores early. Of all the —— fools on earth, we're the worst. Settin' out here in the cold all night—there he goes back again."

The man crossed the corral again, going in the opposite direction. He either went through a gate or crawled through the fence, and blended with the shadows so well that they were unable to see him again. They listened to see if they could hear him shut a door in the house, but there was no sound.

After several moments the dog barked loudly, and from over on the side of a hill came the snapping bark of a coyote. The dog, evidently under leash, grew frantic with its barking; but the coyote did not respond. Hashknife laughed softly.

"What's so danged funny?" asked Sleepy.

"That coyote."

"What in —— is funny about a coyote?"

"Nothin' in general, Sleepy; but that one prob'ly smokes cigarets and packs a gun."

"Yuh mean that it wasn't a coyote, Hashknife?"

"That's what I mean."

"Aw, ——! Why would any man imitate a coyote thataway?"

"To make the dog bark."

"Oh, yeah." Sarcastically. Sleepy was chilled to the bone and aching for a cigaret. "Why in —— would he want to make a dog bark, if I may ask yuh?"

"So that anybody would think he was barkin' at a coyote."

"All right, all right. Some day I'm goin' to ask you a question and get an intelligent answer."

"And what then, Sleepy?"

"The shock will kill me."

Hashknife laughed softly and got to his feet.

"Let's sneak down there and see what that jigger was doin'. He never went into the house; so I don't figure he's part and parcel of the HB outfit."

Cautiously they made their way down the hill and came in behind the stable. Daylight was coming swiftly now, but there was no sign of the man who had crossed the corral. They slid through the corral fence, circled the interior until opposite the door of the stable, where they again passed through the fence.

Part of a long, low shed blocked their view of the house.

"Wait here and keep watch," whispered Hashknife. "I'm goin' inside."

Sleepy crouched against the fence, while Hashknife opened the stable door and went inside. He was in there so long that Sleepy became nervous. It was daylight now, and Sleepy felt like a burglar. He turned his head and looked toward the road. Only a few hundred yards away, coming up the road, was a big group of horsemen.

"That —— sheriff's posse!" snorted Sleepy. He ran to the stable door to notify Hashknife, and met him coming out.

"Swan River and his men are here!" he blurted. "Whatsa matter, didja go to sleep in there?"

Hashknife ran to the corner of the stable and watched the horsemen swing in toward the house.

"C'mon," he whispered, running straight back toward the hill, keeping the stable between him and the ranch-house. Sleepy was at his heels, and together they tumbled into a shallow washout behind some wild rose bushes.

"We can get back to the horses by goin' down this washout," said Hashknife. "Keep yore head down and c'mon."

Swiftly they went down the narrow ravine, where the flood waters had gouged out the soft silt, coming out at the upper edge of a large brush patch, just above the thicket of cottonwoods.

It did not take them long to get their horses, swing back into the road and head for the ranch-house. The posse was grouped at the ranch-house door, talking to old Hank, Bud and Sticky Clay. Swan River had dismounted and was leaning against the porch, but the rest of the crowd were still in their saddles.

They turned to look as Hashknife and Sleepy rode up to them.

"Missed yuh in town, Sheriff," said Hashknife. The sheriff nodded and turned to Hank Bell.

"I'm not chargin' yuh with anythin' Hank. I want yuh to understand that right here. There's been so —— much talk that I had an idea that we ought to come out here this mornin' and find out how much of it was worth arguin' about."

Old Hank squinted at the posse, which was composed of Merton, Sepulveda, Allenby, Sam Bass, Larry Neil, Forty Dollar, Lem Elder, Omaha Olsen and Chet Hoban.

"Well," said old Hank slowly, "what do yuh want to do?" He seemed curiously meek, weary.

"Just to satisfy everybody, suppose we search the place," suggested Swan River.

Old Hank squinted closely at Swan River, as though wondering what they expected to find.

"Go ahead," said Bud slowly. "I reckon we can stand for that."

Old Hank nodded in agreement, and the posse dismounted.

"We'll help yuh, if yuh need us," grinned Sticky Clay.

Old Hank threw open the front door, and the posse filed inside, led by Swan River Smith. Hashknife and Sleepy did not go with them, but sat down on the little front porch. It did not take long to search the house, and then the posse split into two parts, to search the stable and other outhouses. Hashknife followed now, and helped them go over every inch of the place. For about an hour they stayed at the HB, leaving no stone unturned in their efforts to uncover some evidence.

But their time was wasted and they came back to their horses.

"Satisfied?" asked Bud.

Swan River nodded, as he swung into his saddle.

"Yeah, I'm satisfied, Bud—and I hope the rest are."

The rest of them did not express an opinion. Allenby slumped in his saddle, paying little attention to any one during the ride back to town. He had hoped to find June at the HB ranch.

"You never find girl there," declared Sam Bass. "Bell's no fool. We find nothing there."

"That's the way I felt about it," said Swan River. "If Bell did rob the stage and steal the girl, he wouldn't put her in a showcase for us to look at. This idea of goin' out in a crowd, is all foolishness, I tell yuh. Like Hartley said yesterday, this is a one or two man job."

"That's right," agreed Sam."

Allenby, Hashknife and Sleepy did not stop in Moolock, but rode on to the Half-Circle Cross, intending to get breakfast at the ranch.

"I wish I knew what to do," said Allenby wearily. "There is no clue, nothing to work on. The sheriff is right, when he says that those who stole June will not keep her where we can find her. If they want money——"

"I don't reckon they do," said Hashknife. "I know how yuh feel, Allenby. I *sabe* how yore wife must feel about it; but it's somethin' that can't be helped right now. Did you see anythin' of Clayton, after he got shot last night?"

"No, I didn't see him, but Harry did. He told Harry he was going to the ranch. I think some one tried to kill him and that he was frightened into leaving town."

"Harry had a close call," observed Sleepy.

Allenby nodded sadly, but did not express an opinion. It seemed as though his hatred of the HB outfit had burned out, or had burned him out. Mrs. Allenby came from the house to meet them, hoping that they brought news, but was doomed to disappointment. She did not speak. Allenby turned his horse over to Hashknife to unsaddle, and walked to the house with her.

Hashknife and Sleepy stabled the horses and walked back to the bunk-house. Clayton was sitting on the porch of the ranch-house, smoking.

"Well, we're just as wise as we were before we went to the HB," said Sleepy, stretching himself out on a bunk. "Lost one whole night sleep and didn't gain a darned thing. That was probably one of the HB outfit that crossed the corral this mornin'."

"I don't hardly think so," said Hashknife, yawning wearily. "It wasn't none of the HB outfit that barked like a coyote."

"Aw shucks!" Sleepy did not believe that a man had barked like a coyote.

"Well, the dog barked," reminded Hashknife.

"Yeah, the dog barked. He was tied up."

"And if the coyote hadn't barked, some of the HB would 'a' come out to see why the dog barked, wouldn't they?"

Sleepy sat up and scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Yeah, I suppose so, Hashknife."

"The coyote barked first, didn't it? Then the man crossed the corral. After he left the coyote barked closer, didn't it? And the dog barked again—at the coyote."

"Well, what in —— has the coyote got to do with it? What had the man to do with it? You always make a lot out of nothin', Hashknife. You make me lose a whole night's sleep, and then you make boogers out of a man crossin' a corral, or a coyote that sounds like a man. What good did it do us, I'd ask yuh?"

Hashknife walked to the window and looked toward the house. Allenby was sitting on the ranch-house porch, talking to Clayton, and there was no one else in sight. Hashknife turned and came back to Sleepy's bunk.

He reached inside his shirt and drew out two flat envelops covered with seals, which had been broken; two empty Manila envelops, which had been shipped as valuable packages by an express company. Sleepy took them in his hands and looked them over.

"I had a awful time findin' 'em in that barn," said Hashknife, as he took them back and slipped them back inside his shirt. "They were under a currycomb and brush in a little box on the wall."

"That's some of the loot from the train robbery," whispered Sleepy.

"They once held some of the loot," corrected Hashknife.

"But the posse couldn't find anythin'."

"There wasn't anythin' left," grinned Hashknife.

Sleepy squinted at the ceiling thoughtfully. Then—

"Hashknife, who searched that box on the wall?"

Hashknife grinned widely and shook his head.

"Swan River Smith did. These Moolock outlaws ain't fools, cowboys. Now will yuh believe that a man barked like a coyote, Sleepy?"

"——, I'd believe that they buzzed like a rattler, if you say so. Right now I'm in the right frame of mind to believe anythin'. Have yuh got any clue, Hashknife; anythin' to work on? Oh, ——, you wouldn't say so, if yuh had a million clues."

"Yeah, I've got a clue—but I can't tell yuh what it is."

"All right. Keep me in ignorance."

"Don't blame me for what nature done to yuh, Sleepy. Let's snore a few lines, whatcha say? Mebbe we'll need it."

"I can always do that, pardner. Sleep is m' first name."

WHILE Hashknife and Sleepy slumbered in the bunk-house, Allenby told Clayton about their failure to secure any evidence against the HB outfit. He told of the search and of Hank Bell's willingness to have them search the place.

"He's no fool," grumbled Clayton. "He's been expecting trouble for a long time, and he surely wouldn't take a chance on having any incriminating evidence in sight. If he and his outfit robbed that stage and kidnapped June, they wouldn't take her to the ranch."

"No, I suppose not, Clayton. Have you any idea who shot at you?"

"Not in the least," Clayton shook his head, as he felt of his bandaged chest, where the bullet had scored his breastbone.

"You haven't had any trouble with any one, have you?"

Clayton shook his head again quickly.

"Not a bit of it. The only person who might have done it would be that fellow Clay, who shot Harry."

"Did you have any trouble with Clay?"

"Not a bit. I just thought perhaps he might be sore at all of us. I have been out here so much that they seem to think that I am one of the Half-Circle Cross outfit."

"I suppose so," said Allenby dubiously. "Still, it is hardly reasonable, Clayton. Sticky Clay is a gunman, and I don't think he would try to murder you in cold blood."

"Well, pick a more likely man to suspect," Clayton was angered a little over Allenby's insistence. "I've thought about it until I can't arrive at any conclusion. Perhaps that bullet was intended for Hartley. It did not miss him far."

"That might be possible, too. Where is Harry?"

"He went back to town this morning after breakfast. Did Hartley and Stevens ride with the posse?"

"They got there after we did. What time did they leave here this morning?"

"They didn't sleep here last night?"

"Didn't they? That's queer. Swan River Smith said they had gone back to the ranch. They didn't stay in Moolock."

"Well, they didn't stay here," declared Clayton. "Harry and I slept in the bunk-house." He turned his chair and looked at Allenby, as he lowered his voice— "Do you know much about those two men?"

Allenby nodded slowly.

"I know what Freeman told me. He said that Hartley was the shrewdest cattle detective that ever wore a gun. I am not going to question what they do, Clayton. If they wanted to tell the sheriff that they were coming here to the ranch last night, and went elsewhere—that is their business."

"But you did not hire them as detectives?"

"I did not. But I told them both that my former offer of five thousand dollars for a conviction still stands, and that they could do as they pleased while on the job."

"Well, that's different," nodded Clayton. "I just didn't understand the arrangement. I think I'll go back to town and see if anything new has turned up. Want to go along?"

"Not now, Ed."

Allenby went into the house, while Clayton, deep in thought, went to the stable, saddled his horse and rode toward Moolock.

The cook at the Half-Circle Cross did not believe in cooking and serving meals in the middle of the afternoon, but he made an exception in the case of Hashknife and Sleepy. "Wood-tick" Wylie was an old camp-cook, sour of disposition, crippled in both knees with rheumatism, and filled with indignation at the way the United States was run by those at Washington.

" 'F I was the Gover'nor of this danged state, I'd have troops in here, by jin!" he told Hashknife confidentially. "C'n yuh imagine sich a condition of affairs? C'n yuh? I can't. Somebody steals a girl. M' ——, they ort to be torn limb from limb."

Wood-tick shredded a helpless biscuit by way of illustration.

"Yeah, yo're right," admitted Hashknife. "You sure do mingle a wonderful egg, old timer."

"Don't I? When it comes to aigs, I know more than the first hen what laid one. I had a chance to cook f'r Teddy Rosenfeld once. Ain't they doin' nothin' to try and retrieve that girl? Best danged girl yuh ever seen, too. Allenby don't do nothin' much. Helpless as ——.

"Her ma is in there—" he lowered his voice and came closer—"she's in there lookin' at June's pitcher. Jist lookin' at it, mind yuh. Acts like June was dead. Yes, sir, she ain't et nothin' since yest'day. Got a good appetite, too—most of the time. ——'s hinges! Wish I was sheriff of this —— county. I'd shore run somebody a ragged race."

"Kinda hard for the sheriff to get somethin' to work on," said Hashknife, his mouth filled with egg.

"Work on! M' ——, I'd make somethin' to work on. Who shot at Clayton? Nobody knows, eh? Sticky Clay smoked up Harry, did he? By the muddy Missouri River, this here county is gittin' as salty as Utah. Want more aigs? Got a slew of 'em. No?"

"Seems kinda funny to me that none of the other women folks around this county have come in to weep with Mrs. Allenby," observed Sleepy.

"Ain't nothin' funny about it," denied Wood-tick. "Allenby is to blame for it all. He's been so danged uppity, thassall. He ain't never fit in with reg'lar folks. Thinks he's worth more than they are. ——, yuh can't do that."

"Don't make friends, eh?" Thus Hashknife.

"Don't make nothin' but money."

"And somebody steals the profits, eh?"

"They shore do. I kinda think that some folks don't believe that Allenby lost as much stock as he says he has; but he's lost it all right. It's killin' him by inches. Allenby don't think no more of a dollar than he does of his family—or not much more, anyway."

Hashknife pushed away from the table and began rolling a cigaret.

"They tell me that he don't give his family much to spend."

"Much, ——! Nothin'."

They thanked Wood-tick for the meal and went outside. Mrs. Allenby was standing on the front porch, looking off across the hills, shading her eyes. Hashknife studied her for a moment, before going around to the porch. She lowered her hand away from her eyes and looked at Hashknife.

"I—I was just looking," she said simply.

"Yes'm," he nodded. "The hills are kinda pretty this time of day."

"Pretty?" She shook her head slowly. "I didn't notice—much."

"Where is Mr. Allenby?" he asked.

"I think he went to town."

"Oh, yeah, I suppose he did."

"I wish Harry would come home. He stays away most of the time these days. Where do you suppose June is?"

"I dunno, ma'am. It's all kinda mixed up. Clayton was goin' to marry June, wasn't he?"

Mrs. Allenby stared at Hashknife, and a little color came back to her white cheeks.

"Who told you that?" she asked.

"I don't remember. It wasn't a secret, was it, Mrs. Allenby?"

"No, I—I don't know." She shook her

head slowly. "Mr. Allenby wouldn't——"

"He didn't want Clayton for a son-in-law, eh?"

"Did he tell you that?"

"No, he didn't, Mrs. Allenby. Would you want him?"

"Mr. Clayton?"

"Yeah."

"Why—I—what right have you to ask me a question of that kind?"

"Mrs. Allenby, I don't want to pry into your secrets; but I've got to know a few things. If you want your daughter back——"

"Oh, but I do!" Mrs. Allenby gripped the porch-post and stared at Hashknife. "I would sacrifice anything to get June home again."

"Sure yuh would. You'll get her, ma'am; but you've got to have a lot of patience. Now, I want you to answer me this: Does June want to marry Clayton?"

She turned away, shaking her head.

"All right. But you've done quite a lot to convince her that she ought to marry him, ain't yuh?"

Mrs. Allenby turned quickly and stared at him.

"What makes you say that?" she asked hoarsely.

"Because it is true," Hashknife knew that his guess had been correct. "Now you are goin' to tell me why you wanted June to marry Clayton."

"How did you find out these things?" Mrs. Allenby's face was white, but her voice did not tremble now. "Who told you?"

"Nobody, ma'am. Mebbe I read it in the clouds. I just want yuh to tell me why yuh promoted Clayton."

"Promoted him?"

"Well, somethin' like that. Go ahead and talk about it."

For several moments Hashknife was afraid that she was going to rebel. Finally she sat down in a rocking-chair near him, and he knew that the point was won.

"It was the wrong thing to do," she began slowly. "But you do not know my husband. His one ambition is money. All his life he has been a slave to money. No, I am not complaining, nor excusing myself. I did wrong, and I will admit everything I have done.

"Ed Clayton has wanted to marry June ever since he first came here to buy cattle. June did not seem to care for him. Mr. Allenby liked him as a cattle-buyer, but he did not want him to marry June.

"I did not dislike Ed Clayton. He was a gentleman, until——"

Mrs. Allenby shook her head sadly.

"At any rate he asked Mr. Allenby for June's hand, and was refused. It did not seem to make any difference to Clayton. He told me about it all, and asked me to intercede for him. I knew it was useless. When Mr. Allenby makes up his mind to a thing, nothing can change him.

"I told Mr. Clayton that it would not help his case in any way. He and Harry were great friends; so Harry came and asked me to help Clayton out. Harry liked Clayton, who always had money. You know, Harry never has any money. His father does not believe in giving children money—and he does not realize that Harry and June have grown up.

"Later I began to hear stories about Harry. They said that he was drinking and gambling. I know that his father heard the same stories, but he merely laughed and proved to me that it was all lies, because Harry had no money to drink and gamble with.

"Ed Clayton knew that I idolized my children. He knew that I would go to any length to help them. So one day he came to me and asked me to see if I couldn't help him win June. I gave him the same answer. He did not get angry, nor did he threaten; but he did show me receipts for borrowed money, a total of five thousand dollars, signed with Harry's name.

"Clayton had loaned Harry all that money. Clayton knew what Mr. Allenby would do, if he knew that Harry had done such a thing. But Clayton did not threaten me. He just pointed out the fact that some one must pay that money. He had loaned it in good faith.

"He said to me—

"'Mrs. Allenby, I love June more than anything in the world, and I will try to make her happy. I feel sure that a little urging will win for me. And, in that event, I will give you these receipts, and everything will be forgotten.'

"That is why I tried to—oh, I know it was all wrong, but——"

"Yeah, it was all wrong, Mrs. Allenby," agreed Hashknife.

"But my urging did not help—" Mrs. Allenby was crying now—"and I am glad.

It would have been like selling my June. I realized it afterward, but at that time I could only see what might happen to Harry, don't you see?"

"Yeah, I see," Hashknife got to his feet. "I'm sure obliged to yuh, ma'am. This here is a secret between us."

"Oh, I hope so," she said wearily. "I don't know why I told it to you."

"Thassall right, ma'am," smiled Hashknife, as he walked back to the bunkhouse, where he joined Sleepy.

"What was you and the lady chawin' about, Hashknife?" asked Sleepy.

"Arguin' about raisin' chickens. She favored Plymouth Rocks and I held out for Rhode Island Reds."

"And she cried for her side, eh? Yeah, I seen her wipe her eyes. You can lie faster than I can, Hashknife."

HASHKNIFE grinned and headed for the stable, where they saddled their horses and started for town. They found Forty Dollar at the sheriff's office, bewailing everything.

"Swan River has led out another posse," he told them. "He's got Allenby, Sepulveda, Merton, Omaha and Hoban with him, and they're headin' toward Tecoma. Dunno where in —— they're goin', but they're goin', thassall. Swan River made me stay here, dang his old hide. Said somebody had to protect the office."

He did not get much sympathy from Hashknife and Sleepy; so he paraded the rest of his woes, thusly:

"Ed Clayton is drunk and wants to fight somebody, the big brute. Harry Allenby is drunk enough to brag again, and he wants to help Clayton whip somebody, and there ain't nobody around here to accommodate 'em. Pinon Meade might fight the two of 'em, if he got drunk enough; but Clayton, alone, is twice as big as Pinon. So there yuh are. On account of my official position I can't fight 'em. Any news of the lost girl?"

Hashknife grinned at Forty Dollar's woes and shook his head.

"No news, Forty. You heard anythin'?"

"How the —— could I, settin' here all the time?"

Forty Dollar borrowed Hashknife's Durham and rolled a cigaret.

"It ain't none of my business," he said pointedly, "but I was just wonderin' where you two fellers were when we rode up to the HB this mornin'."

Hashknife lifted his brows slightly, but his expression remained the same. Then a smile wreathed his lips.

"What makes yuh ask that question, Forty?"

"Curiosity. We was late gettin' started, and we sure did whang —— out of our horses all the way. We never passed yuh on the road, and when yuh came up to us, yore horses wasn't even breathin' hard."

"Forty Dollar," grinned Hashknife, "yo're a born detective."

"Yeah? Well, I do notice some things. I kinda had a hunch that you fellers was pokin' around. Swan River wondered why yuh wasn't there to join the posse, and I told him that you wasn't the kind to run in packs."

"I reckon that's true," laughed Hashknife. "Swan River didn't say when he'd be back, did he?"

"He didn't know. Everybody expects him to be headin' a searchin' party; so he's doin' it. He was just ready to start when Allenby rode in; so they took him along. I reckon Clayton didn't know they were goin'. Anyway, he didn't go along."

They invited Forty Dollar to go over to the Elk saloon with them, but he declined. Swan River had told Forty Dollar to stay at the office, which meant in town, but Forty Dollar translated it literally, and gloried in his martyrdom.

Harry Allenby was at the Elk, still wearing his bandage, which was slightly disarranged, and he was more than partly drunk. Hashknife took him aside and advised him to go home, but Harry would have none of Hashknife's advice.

"You ain't runnin' my business," he told Hashknife angrily. "I do as I —— please."

"That's yore whole trouble," said Hashknife. "Yo're just a fool kid, without brains enough to pound sand into a rathole. You go on home and quit spendin' money that don't belong to you."

The shot went home. Harry's eyes blinked for a moment and he had difficulty in swallowing; but he tried to bluff.

"What in —— do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"You know what I mean, Harry. If you want me to tell it, I'll tell it loud enough for every one to hear."

"Who told you that?" Harry's voice was hoarse with anxiety.

"Who told me what?" asked Hashknife.

"That—that—" Harry hesitated, trying to clear his thoughts. "That I was spending money that didn't belong to me," he finished lamely. "It's a lie, anyway."

"It's the truth, kid," Hashknife spoke softly and with conviction. "Yore mother wants yuh to come home."

"Aw, ——!" Harry turned away and walked outside.

For several minutes he stood on the porch of the saloon, thinking it over, but decided that he didn't want to go home; so he walked up to the White Horse saloon and went inside.

There were few men in the Elk. Three cowpunchers were playing a game of freezeout at one of the tables, while "Snowy" Garnette and a railroad contractor were playing two-handed stud. Hashknife and Sleepy drifted to the pool-table and began playing bottle pool.

Their game was about half finished when Harry came back, and with him was Ed Clayton. Clayton had been drinking, but he was not drunk. He and Harry had a drink together, and were at the bar when Hashknife and Sleepy put up their cues.

Hashknife noticed that both of them were serious, and as Hashknife approached the bar Clayton stepped in front of him. In spite of Hashknife's height, Clayton was half-a-head taller, and weighed at least fifty pounds more.

"Who in —— told you that I loaned Harry money?" asked Clayton angrily.

Hashknife squinted coldly at Clayton and said—

"I didn't say yuh did, Clayton?"

"You didn't?" Clayton whirled on Harry. "Didn't you say he told you that, Harry?"

"Why, I—I—that's what he meant, Ed. He didn't——"

"——!" Clayton turned back to Hashknife. "Where did you get this misinformation, Hartley?"

"I don't reckon I was misinformed," smiled Hashknife easily. "It kinda looks like Harry had proved it. I didn't say who he got the money from—but *he* did."

"Is that so?" Clayton sneered openly. "Well, I just want to tell you that it's none of your —— business, Hartley. You are taking too much for granted, and I want you to keep your face out of my business, or I'll bust it wide open."

"Yore business?" asked Hashknife innocently. "That won't take much, because it's already beginnin' to crack."

Clayton was rather a sudden sort of person, and believed in the theory that the first punch wins. This tall, skinny puncher was only three feet away, slouched easily, when Clayton's left fist snapped straight for his jaw. But that easy slouch was misleading, and allowed Hashknife to sway aside while the blow merely swished into empty air.

Hashknife did not lift his hands, but he did step back with a grin on his lips. Clayton blinked and recovered his balance. It was the first time he had missed with the snappy left, which was his stock in trade, and usually put him in a good position to finish the fight without much opposition. The card games ceased immediately. Harry started forward, only to have Sleepy kick his feet from under him and drop him in a sitting position half under a table.

"Git a front seat!" grunted Sleepy.

Clayton forced a smile to cover his chagrin. He did not expect this cowpuncher to put up a fight.

"Yuh hadn't ought to telegraph yore punch," grinned Hashknife. "A one-punch fighter like you ought to figure out a system, Clayton. Yuh tried to sneak one on me, but yore eyes and the whole left side of yuh told me what yuh was goin' to do."

"Did, eh?" Clayton smiled grimly as he fell into a crouch.

"Stop this one!" He darted at Hashknife, smashing with both hands. It was a disastrous attack. His right fist snapped against the top of Hashknife's head, the left missed entirely, and Clayton went backward, half doubled up from a punishing smash in the stomach.

He backed out of range, his mouth wide open, as he tried to pump air into his lungs. Hashknife laughed and shook his head.

"Go in and get him, cowboy," advised Sleepy. "He's whipped right now."

"Like —— he is!" snorted Clayton, shutting his teeth, and trying to strain the kinks out of his midriff.

"Well, come on and finish it," invited Hashknife. "If I wanted to whip yuh, I'd 'a' stopped the fight before this; but it ain't no fight of my makin', Clayton."

Clayton was game, but wary. He had tasted one of Hashknife's punches, and did not care for another of the same kind; so he elected to try the long-range game. He felt that this cowpuncher knew nothing about boxing. Some one shoved a table away, to give them more room, and Harry Allenby crawled on his hands and knees to the bar-rail, where he sat down, closely watched by Sleepy.

Clayton went in slowly, balanced easily on the balls of his feet, his guard high. Hashknife watched him calmly, guard down. It seemed to anger Clayton to think that this lanky person did not take the fight seriously enough to put up his hands.

Clayton stepped in range, snapping his left at Hashknife's head. It was rather a weak attempt and Hashknife avoided it easily as he stepped inside the blow, blocked Clayton's right, and drove another punch to Clayton's middle.

It was enough to cause Clayton to drop his guard and step back; but this time the lanky cowboy stepped with him, and before Clayton could lift a hand to stop it, Hashknife uppercut him to the point of his jaw, with a full sweeping blow—and the fight ended.

Clayton collapsed heavily, rolled over on his back and stared at the ceiling.

"THE most complete thing I ever seen," declared Snowy Garnette, leaving the table and walking to the fallen man. "I knew that Clayton would get whipped some day; but I thought it would take a bigger man than he is."

The bartender threw a little water into Clayton's face, and he sat up, gasping. It was a full minute before he realized what had happened. He got painfully to his feet, leaned on the bar for a while, trying to regain his balance, and walked outside, without a word. Harry Allenby followed him, rather disconsolately. His idol had fallen—and fallen hard.

No one asked Hashknife what started the fight. Snowy invited every one to have a drink, and waited on them personally. There had been no loud talking, no swearing. A man could have stood out in front of the saloon and not been aware of trouble within.

"I've paid twenty dollars to see a fight that wasn't half as good," declared the contractor. "Here's to one cowpuncher that don't need to shoot his man to win."

Hashknife and Sleepy left the saloon as soon as possible after the toast. Hashknife disliked adulation—and he did not want to drink any more; so they excused themselves and went back to the sheriff's office, where Sleepy proceeded to tell Forty Dollar about the fight.

"Jist my darned luck!" wailed Forty Dollar. "Here I been layin' on my miserable back, readin' 'Deserted at the Altar,' while there's a fight jist across the street. That ain't no way to treat a friend. And yuh knocked Ed Clayton out! Can't git it through m' head, thassall. Bigger'n you are, every way."

"Don't know the first thing about fightin'," declared Sleepy. "Clumsy as a cub bear. Hashknife slapped him in the stummick and took all the fight out of him. Yaller as a dandelion."

"Um-m-m," Forty Dollar was not convinced. "I've seen him put up a good fight. Well, I've allus said that he'd meet his match some of these days. I used to be a fighter m'self, and I know."

"Did you meet yore match?" asked Sleepy.

"Did I? Say, I met a whole danged box of 'em. What did Harry think of the fight?"

"I kicked him into a front seat," grinned Sleepy. "I reckon he wanted to referee; but we didn't need none. When they tackle old Hashknife, there ain't but one decision to give. He just pets 'em on the chin, thassall."

"Braggin' is bad; but lyin' and braggin' at the same time is worse," declared Hashknife. "Yore loop is draggin'."

"All right," laughed Sleepy. "If yuh don't believe me, Forty Dollar—ask Ed Clayton."

"I'll take yore word for it."

"Are you familiar with the 27A brand?" asked Hashknife.

"Me?" Forty seemed amazed. "Say, I've been in this country ever since the big trade between the Injuns and the soldiers."

"What big trade was that?" asked Sleepy innocently.

"Lead f'r lead. What do yuh want to know about the 27A?"

"Where do they brand?"

"Right shoulder. The 7 and the A are connected."

"Uh-huh," Hashknife nodded solemnly, and walked to the door. He could see Ed Clayton and Harry Allenby in front of the White Horse saloon, and as he watched them, Clayton drew back his right hand and knocked Harry into the street.

It was not a knockout punch, but it sent Harry rolling into the dust. He clawed his way to his feet and went staggering across the street. Hashknife called Sleepy and Forty Dollar to the door and told them about it. Clayton went back in to the saloon, while Harry sat down on the sidewalk in front of the general store.

"Harry seems to get it from all sides," observed Forty Dollar. "His luck is runnin' kinda muddy, this week."

Harry leaned against a post and seemed content to stay where he was. In a few minutes Pinon Meade came out of the White Horse, got his horse at the hitch-rack and rode out of town toward the 27A. The three men at the sheriff's office went inside and sat down again. It was hot out there in the street.

Hashknife tilted back against the wall in his chair and made pencil notes on the back of an envelop, while Sleepy and Forty Dollar started an argument as to who won the Boer war.

It was a perfectly good argument, because neither of them knew just what countries had fought the war. Sleepy contended that the Swedes were the winners, and managed to prove it to Forty Dollar's satisfaction. Several points were proved by Hashknife, who was so engrossed in his own notes that he "yessed" every question.

Just before dark Swan River rode into Moolock, leading a thoroughly tired posse of men. Their long ride had netted them nothing. They had come back past the 27A ranch, where Sam Bass had left the posse. Allenby was discouraged. He asked for Harry and found that Harry had gone home.

Clayton, showing no ill effects from his fight, talked with Allenby, after which he got his horse and rode away with him toward the ranch. Swan River stretched his tired body and swore witheringly at his luck.

"We went plumb to Tecoma," he said. "It's like huntin' for a needle in a straw-stack. Didn't find out a danged thing. I reckon Allenby is all broke up over it; but I can't help it, if he is."

"Let's eat," suggested Forty Dollar. "There ain't been much happened around here since yuh left, except that Hashknife had a fight with Clayton, knocked Clayton plumb out; and Clayton hit Harry Allenby later on. Otherwise it's been Sunday all day."

Swan River gawped foolishly at this information, but thought it was a joke and refused to question Forty Dollar. But he soon discovered that it was no joke. They went to the Blue Front for supper and heard the bartender of the Elk giving a vivid description of the battle.

"I didn't know that there was trouble between you and Clayton," said Swan River, as they sat down.

"There wasn't," smiled Hashknife. "He just wanted to fight."

"Uh-huh," Swan River was a bit dubious over this.

He knew that something must have been of sufficient import to cause such a battle; but he was willing to outwardly accept Hashknife's explanation.

They ate their supper and drifted to the Elk saloon, where they ran into Sticky Clay. He was perfectly sober. A big poker game was in progress, which interested Sleepy and Forty Dollar. Swan River got into conversation with Snowy Garnette, and Sticky Clay drew Hashknife aside.

"You ain't seen Bud Bell, have yuh?" asked Sticky.

"Nope—not since we were out to the ranch."

"Un-hah. He ain't been here today, eh?"

"I don't think so. Anyway, I haven't seen him. What's wrong?"

"Nothin', I reckon. Bud rode away just after that gang was out there, and he ain't come back. Me and the old man was kinda worried. —— it, I dunno why we are either, except that there's so much —— bein' raised around here."

"Bud can take care of himself," said Hashknife consolingly.

"Ordinarily," conceded Sticky. "I suppose he's all right. Yuh see, Hartley, I think a lot of Bud."

"Sure," Hashknife nodded seriously. "I wanted to ask yuh somethin', Clay."

"Ask me somethin'? All right, what is it?"

"About that mixup between you and Harry Allenby. Did you know that Harry was gunnin' for you?"

"Well—yeah, yuh might say I did. He was just drunk enough to be lookin' for trouble. Somebody mentioned it to me earlier in the evenin', and then Pinon Meade lead me to look out for Harry. He said that Harry was in the White Horse, makin' a war-talk."

"I see." Thoughtfully. "Is Pinon Meade a friend of yours?"

"Friend?" Sticky squinted narrowly. "No-o-o, I reckon not. Yuh see, a feller like me don't have friends, Hartley."

"Why not, Clay?"

"I dunno. Mebbe it's cause I work for Hank Bell; mebbe it's 'cause I look like I do. I'm kind of a mongrel, Hartley. Folks call me a gun-fighter—meanin' that I'm dangerous. It's jist like somebody sayin' to yuh, 'That dog will bite.'

"From that time on, that dog will be a dangerous animal to you. You won't never stop to figure out that the dog is good for anythin', except to bite folks. That's me. I've been branded a gun-fighter; and folks, never figure that I eat food like other folks snore in m' sleep and wear the seats out of my pants."

Hashknife did not laugh. There was nothing humorous in Sticky Clay's simile. It was rather pathetic.

"I reckon I know how yuh feel," said Hashknife.

"That's fine," nodded Sticky seriously. "I reckon I'll be goin', Hartley. Moolock ain't none too safe for one of the HB outfit to be found in. There ain't no news from that girl, is there?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"Kinda tough luck," said Sticky. "I'd like to feel sorry for Allenby."

He turned to leave the room when Larry Neil ran in and yelled at the sheriff—

"Hey, Swan River! Clayton and old man Allenby just got here. They found Harry half-way between here and the Half-Circle Cross, and brought him in. He's all shot to ——!"

The sheriff and Forty Dollar ran for the door, while there was a general exodus in that direction. Hashknife caught Sticky by the arm and whispered in his ear—

"Don't tell anybody that Bud is missin'."

"——!" blurted Sticky. "I'd been inquirin' for him before I met you."

STICKY hurried away, while Hashknife joined the crowd that were on their way to the doctor's office to see how badly Harry had been hurt. Swan River tried to keep every one out of the house, but allowed Hashknife to slip inside.

Clayton and Allenby were at the bedside, watching the doctor make his examination, and nodded at Hashknife. Harry had been shot three times and was unconscious. One bullet had ripped through the fleshy part of his left shoulder, another bored through his left shoulder, just beneath the collar-bone, while the third struck lower on the left side and seemed to have skidded off a rib.

"Shot from in front, eh?" observed Hashknife.

"Yes," said Allenby shakily. "Harry fired two shots at whoever dropped him. When he regains consciousness we will know who shot him."

"And that killer was a good shot," said Hashknife softly. "He was sure shootin' at the kid's heart. Notice that all three of 'em are on the left side."

"Sticky Clay is a good shot," said Clayton meaningly.

Hashknife squinted at Clayton closely, but Clayton did not meet his eyes. The doctor was busily engaged in cleansing the wounds, and Allenby began pacing the small room. Outside, they could hear the crowd questioning the sheriff. Forty Dollar came in to get a report from the doctor, and went back to report to the crowd.

"How soon will he be able to tell us about it?" asked Allenby.

"I don't know." The doctor shook his head. "He has lost considerable blood, but the wounds are not necessarily dangerous."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Allenby.

Clayton got to his feet and moved over to the door.

"I'm going to grab a bite to eat, and then I'll be in shape to sit up here tonight," he said.

Allenby nodded quickly and took Clayton's seat beside the bed.

Hashknife walked outside and headed for the Elk saloon. The crowd had dispersed, feeling that Harry had better than a fighting chance; and many of them were back at the saloons, having a drink after the excitement.

Clayton had gone straight to the Elk bar, and Hashknife saw him drinking with Lem Elder. Frosty Welcome, the hotel proprietor, was at the bar, drinking with Joe Egan, his clerk. Frosty grinned at Hashknife and invited him to have a drink.

"I'm celebratin'," he explained a trifle thickly.

"Birthday?" asked Hashknife.

"Nawshir—not birthday. I'm goin' out of the —— hotel business. Tired of it.

Yesshir, I'm sick of the business. Joe's goin' to run the hotel f'r me, ain't yuh, Joe?"

"And that's whatever," nodded Joe. "I shore can run her, too."

"What are you goin' to do?" queried Hashknife.

"Cattle. By golly, I'm a cattleman, I am. Jus' bought me a ranch, and I'm goin' to run it. Pay f'r it tonight. Have 'nother drink?"

"I'll buy this one," said Hashknife grinning. "Goin' to give me a good job on this ranch, ain't yuh?"

"Tha's a good idea, by golly," agreed Frosty. "Need a good man. Shay, all jokin' aside, will yuh take a job? I can't hire yuh until I own it; but I'll own it, y'betcha. Here's a go."

They drank and placed their glasses on the bar. Hashknife noticed that Lem Elder had left the bar, but Clayton was still there.

"You must 'a' made money in that hotel," observed Hashknife.

"Sure, I made money," agreed Frosty. "But I never made enough to buy a cattle outfit. I had money in the bank, I did. I sold out a cattle ranch over in Ross Basin three years ago, and bought this danged hotel; but I banked most of the money. I'm sick of the hotel, and I'm celebratin' my recovery, I am."

"You goin' to have a big outfit?" asked Hashknife.

"Big enough. I'm goin' to blot all them —— 27A cattle, and register m' old Circle W agin', I am. Have 'nother drink?"

Hashknife managed to decline another drink, and went away, leaving Frosty and Joe in an argument as to the proper way to run a hotel. Sleepy was watching a poker game when Hashknife nudged him, and they left the place together.

Hashknife led the way to their horses and they rode out of town, heading northeast. Sleepy did not question him now. He knew that Hashknife had discovered something and that he would tell about it at the right time.

"Goin' to rain," observed Sleepy, as they traveled over the road which led to Tecoma. "Wish we had our slickers. I hate to get wet."

"Worse things than gettin' wet," grunted Hashknife. Rain clouds blotted out the light from the sky, and they were forced to let the horses make their own way over the road. A wind was blowing in from the northeast, filling their faces with dust from the road.

But this discomfort did not last long. A dazzling flash of lightning, a crash of thunder—and the rain drifted into them in a solid wall of water, which quickly turned the deep dust in a muck of mud. They bowed their heads to the downpour and went on.

"Let up pretty soon!" yelled Hashknife consolingly.

But the storm had no intention of letting up. The lightning and thunder went rumbling away down the valley, but the rain elected to stay. It was nearly two hours after their departure from Moolock. Both cowboys were soaked to the skin, and Sleepy was beginning to grow profanely sarcastic; but Hashknife said nothing in return.

Hashknife was riding on the right side of the road, peering at the fence, which bordered the road. He had been riding thus for several miles, and now he grunted thankfully, as the outlines of a gate caught his eye, and a road turned through it at almost right angles to the one they had been following.

"C'mon," he said. "Here's where we turn, cowboy."

"Thank —— for anythin'!" exploded Sleepy. "The water is runnin' out of my boot-tops right now."

Half a mile off the main road, as they were passing through a brushy spot, Hashknife swung his horse into Sleepy's animal, forcing both animals into the brush and off the road. A few moments later a rider loomed up in the rain, and went past them, heading toward the main road.

It was impossible to distinguish the identity of the rider. They were about to move back into the road, when another rider, this one traveling at a gallop, went past their hiding-place, fairly splashing them with mud. It was evident that this later rider was anxious to overtake the other.

"Now that the mud-hen parade has gone past—" said Sleepy suggestively.

"We go on," said Hashknife quickly. "It can't be far to the ranch. Mebbe I've made a mistake, but I don't think so."

About two hundred yards farther on they came to the blacker bulk of corrals and outbuildings. From there they could see an open doorway, where the light from an oil lamp illuminated part of a buckboard and team, which was standing close to the porch.

They rode up and dismounted. No one was in sight, but as they entered the house a voice called from the kitchen—

"What in —— is the matter now?"

Hashknife grinned at Sleepy, but did not reply. A moment later the speaker stepped into the room, a look of surprize on his face. He was a medium-sized individual, with a hooked nose and a scraggly beard. His clothes consisted of a badly worn blue suit, a moth-eaten fedora hat and yellow boots. Also worthy of mention was a batwing celluloid collar, of about sixteen-size, while the neck it encircled would have had plenty of freedom in a fourteen.

Circling his waist, mostly hidden by his coat, was a heavy cartridge belt, studded with ammunition, and below the edge of the coat protruded the end of a revolver holster. In his left hand he carried an old, yellow valise, bulging full.

"Huh!" he exclaimed explosively. "Where'd you fellers come from?"

Hashknife did not reply, as he squinted around the room. His gaze came back to the man with the valise, and he said—

"Yo're the cook, ain't yuh?"

"Yeah, I'm the cook."

"That's fine," grinned Hashknife, slapping his wet thighs. "We are hungry as ——, pardner."

"Thasso?" The cook leaned against the wall negligently. "Well, yo're about half out of luck, gents. Right now I ain't got no time to do any cookin'. I'm the only one at the ranch, and I'm goin' to town right away. Sorry, but it's got to be done."

"We'll pay yuh for the food," said Hashknife, ignoring the cook's statement.

"Will yuh?" The cook scowled impatiently. "Like I said before, I'm goin' to town, and I'm lockin' up everythin'; *sabe?*"

"I heard yuh," Hashknife's tone changed entirely. "We'll cook our own meal, and lock up for yuh. How do yuh like that?"

"Not a chance. I'd be a —— of a feller to leave you two here alone, wouldn't I? ——, I don't even know yore names."

"Mine's Hashknife Hartley."

The cook stiffened slightly at the sound of the name and his eyes shifted, as he moistened his lips. Then he shook his head.

"Don't remember hearin' it before," he said, trying to make his voice behave.

"No?" Hashknife grinned widely. The cook shifted his feet, as he placed the valise on the floor, and his right elbow seemed to accidently catch in his coat and throw it away from his holster.

And as he straightened up his right hand flipped to his gun. It was a swift draw, which proved that the cook's experience with pots and pans had not caused him to forget how to draw a gun; but it availed him nothing.

His gun came to his waist level, but there was a nervless finger on the trigger; nervless because Hashknife's bullet had hit the cook dead center before the latter's gun hardly had left its holster. The cook's gun spun over on his finger, fell to the floor, while the cook slid sidewise, almost blocking the door to the kitchen.

SLEEPY coughed from the powder fumes and snapped his own gun back into the holster.

"Neat, but not gaudy," he commented dryly. "He never knowed what hit him—if that was any satisfaction, Hashknife. Just why did he go after his gun?"

"Scared," said Hashknife seriously, as he stepped over and looked at the victim. "My name got him, Sleepy. If he was an honest man, it wouldn't 'a' made him try to kill me."

"All right," nodded Sleepy nervously. "I dunno what it's all about; but I'm for yuh, tall feller. What do we shoot at next?"

Hashknife stepped over the cook's body and Sleepy followed him into the kitchen, where an oil lamp gave fair illumination. It was a typical ranch-house kitchen, which had been presided over by a male cook; none too clean and not at all tidy.

Hashknife looked around, and suddenly had an inspiration. He went back, got the yellow valise and opened it on the kitchen table. In it was a couple of shirts, a miscellany of underwear, socks, red neckties; and underneath all this was eighteen hundred dollars in currency, mostly in ten and twenty dollar bills.

"Cookin' pays well in this country," observed Hashknife dryly. "Either that, or he has saved about three years salary intact."

"Seems like a reg'lar diagnosis," agreed

Sleepy. Hashknife sat down, replaced the things into the valise and rolled a cigaret, while Sleepy mechanically rolled one also and wondered just what it was all about.

Hashknife smoked slowly, as he stared at the floor, deep in thought. Suddenly he shot forward out of his chair, landed on his hands and knees on the none-too-clean floor, looking at it closely. Sleepy ducked sidewise, the instinct of self-preservation causing him to also land on his hands and knees.

"What is it?" he demanded quickly.

"Get an ax!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Look outside—at the woodpile, Sleepy. Take the lamp!"

It did not take Sleepy long to acquire the desired article. The woodpile was handy to the kitchen door, as was usual for the convenience of the cook. He handed the ax to Hashknife.

"What's the idea, Hashknife?" he panted.

"Take a look," grinned Hashknife. "They've got their root-house under the kitchen, and they've nailed the door tight. Look at the fresh bruises on the boards, cowboy; and look where they took the hinges off to make it look like it wasn't a cellar. Get back."

At the risk of knocking down everything in the room, Hashknife swung the heavy ax into the joint between the boards and tore the nails loose. Straight across one end of the former trap-door he pried up the boards, while Sleepy ripped them loose at the other end.

An odor of ancient vegetable and dry rot drifted up to them, and a rickety stairway showed that Hashknife was right. Throwing the ax aside, Hashknife picked up the lamp and went down the stairs, with Sleepy close behind him, peering into the cellar.

Crash! Something whizzed out of the gloom and knocked the lamp out of Hashknife's hand, showering them with glass from the smashed chimney, but fortunately extinguishing the light before it could ignite the kerosene.

Then, out of the darkness came something, crashing into them, striking, kicking; taking them so unawares that they went down in a heap, trying to protect themselves in that narrow space. Hashknife ripped out a curse that would have been a credit to a mule-skinner, flung himself forward, and they all crashed to the bottom.

"Sleepy, can yuh light a match?" Hashknife's voice was muffled, strained.

Sleepy managed to extricate himself from the twisting mass, bumped his head severely on something, but managed to scratch a match, which he held above his head. The air was hazy with dust, but he was able to see that Hashknife was lying across the body of a man, whose face was a mass of dirt and blood. Sleepy squinted beyond, where a girl crouched against the wall, her white face and staring eyes turned toward the lighted match. It was June Allenby.

Hashknife lifted his face and looked at her. Then he slowly lifted himself from the prostrate body, which turned quickly. It was Bud Bell. He peered at Hashknife, his mouth wide open, as he tried to spit out the dirt he had accumulated.

"Well," said Hashknife slowly, "we're all here, it seems."

"Hartley?" Bud's voice was a whisper. He spat out more dirt and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. Sleepy scratched more matches, handed them to Hashknife, and ran upstairs to the living room, where he got the lamp.

"June, we're all right," panted Bud. "These men are friends."

The girl nodded slowly, helplessly.

"They've had her here quite a long time, don'tcha know?" Bud felt of his head tenderly. "I—I went huntin' for her, Hartley. I don't know what day that was. The last thing I remembered was when I was eatin' in the 27A kitchen.

"There wasn't nobody but me and Lew Meeker, the cook, there. I heard a funny noise. It sounded like somebody calling. I asked Lew what it was, I think. Then somethin' hit me, I reckon. Anyway, I woke up down here."

"Let's go upstairs," suggested Hashknife. "I don't like the smell of old vegetables. Can yuh walk, Miss Allenby?"

She nodded and made a brave attempt, but failed. Hashknife caught her in his arms and carried her up the stairs, while Sleepy and Bud followed them to the living-room, where Hashknife placed her on a rickety old couch.

"They had me all tied up," she said wearily. "I got the gag loose, and cried for help. In a few minutes they brought Bud down here. I didn't know it was Bud for quite a while. They hurt him so badly that he did not move for a long time. It was only a little while ago that he—that we found out who each other was. Bud had a few matches."

Bud nodded in confirmation and looked at the body of the cook.

"We heard the shot," he said.

"When did they take the ropes off you, Miss Allenby?" asked Hashknife.

"When they brought Bud down. Then I heard them driving nails. It was awful to be down there in the dark." She shuddered and the tears came to her eyes.

"Yo're a danged brave girl," applauded Hashknife. "You ran into a holdup, didn't yuh?"

She stared at Hashknife for several moments before she nodded.

"You knew the robbers; so they had to kidnap yuh, eh?"

She shut her lips tightly and shook her head.

"Then why did they take yuh with 'em?"

"She won't talk about it," said Bud. "I asked her a dozen times. I dunno why, but she won't tell me."

"Thassall right," nodded Hashknife.

"Well, if it's all right," nodded Bud, "how did you fellers happen to come out here?"

"Lookin'," grinned Hashknife, getting to his feet. "Can you drive a team?"

"I sure can." Bud's last effort to force a way out of the cellar had not exhausted his remaining strength.

"I hit yore lamp with an old potato," he grinned. "It was all I could find. There wasn't a rock nor a club down there."

"Thanks for all small favors," said Sleepy. "That spud hit me in the neck and I've still got glass in my hair."

Hashknife put the yellow valise in the buckboard, helped June into the seat and turned the equipage over to Bud. The rain had ceased, but it left miles of soggy road for them to travel back to Moolock.

"We'll spin along ahead," Hashknife told Bud. "Make as good time as yuh can and tie in front of the hotel. Let's hit the grit."

Hashknife and Sleepy mounted, spurred into a gallop and began throwing mud, while behind them came the 27A buckboard team, rain-soaked and eager to get warm.

HARRY ALLENBY was showing no signs of returning consciousness. He had lost much blood, but the doctor was optimistic over the outcome. Swan River Smith was as anxious as any one for Harry to talk. He felt sure that Harry knew who had shot him.

"Probably an even break," was the decision of Forty Dollar, at the Elk saloon. "Harry was due to get it sooner or later. If Sticky Clay hadn't misjudged his shot, Harry would now be under the little grasslets. Yuh gotta be a dinger to hunt for trouble in this here county, and come out on top."

"Tha's whatever, says I," declared Frosty Welcome, who was due to pass out of the picture very soon. Frosty had gazed too intently at the juice of the corn to remain perpendicular much longer.

"Shush ri'," agreed Joe Egan vacantly, which proved that he had also run aground on the shoals of John Barleycorn. "Lezhava drink. Whazza matter 'ith 'vrybody? Stop twis'in' 'round."

And thus passed Joe Egan, who was to become the proprietor of the Moolock hotel. Some one propped him up in a chair, and in a few minutes they placed Frosty Welcome on his lap.

All of which was a disgraceful proceeding, especially as Frosty Welcome had agreed to consummate a deal with Joe Bass for the purchase of the 27A that night—and Frosty was in no condition to consummate anything.

It seemed that Moolock county was fairly well represented in Moolock town that night, and the drink emporiums were doing a good business. It might also be mentioned that the games of chance were running full blast.

About ten o'clock, which was probably the time agreed upon between Sam Bass and Frosty Welcome to complete their deal, Sam Bass entered the Elk saloon, and found to his chagrin that one-half of the deal was slumbering audibly on the lap of his hired man.

Sam Bass was mad. He shook Frosty viciously, and was rewarded with a louder snore from Frosty and a groan from Joe. The crowd objected to having Sam annoy Frosty. Forty Dollar told Sam to "git to —— away from there, and let sleepin' dogs lay."

Sam went away, swearing to himself,

while Frosty cuddled down on the half-dead Joe Egan and continued to sleep deeply. Sam went back to the White Horse, where he found Lem Elder and Pinon Meade. Ed Clayton had just come from the doctor's office and reported that there was no change in Harry's condition. He accepted a drink invitation from Sam Bass, who proceeded to tell them about Frosty Welcome.

"And he say he pay me cash for ranch," said Sam cautiously. "He give me five thousand day before yesterday, and he say he give me rest tonight, ten o'clock. —— fool too drunk now, can't wake up."

"How much time is there left?" Thus Lem anxiously.

Sam looked at his watch.

"Still got an hour and forty minutes. But that ain't enough, I tell yuh. That —— fool can't sober up that quick."

"It's about time for Lew to show up, ain't it?" asked Pinon. "He's suppose to——"

"Aw, to —— with him!" Sam Bass did not care to discuss small details.

"What became of Hartley and Stevens?" Thus Lem Elder. "They went away right after the doctor made his examination."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Clayton.

"—— sure. I've been up and down both sides of the street. Their horses ain't at the racks and they ain't in none of the buildings."

Clayton and the three men from the 27A left the White Horse and went back to the Elk. Frosty Welcome had slipped from the lap of Joe Egan and was now reclining on the floor, with Joe's feet on his head. Sam Bass snorted an oath, as they turned to the bar and ordered their drinks.

Sticky Clay came in and sat down near the door. He looked more sinister than ever tonight. He knew that some one had suggested that he had met Harry Allenby and they had finished their battle; but Sticky was not going to be frightened out of town by their talk.

A few minutes later Hank Bell came in. He looked around the place, saw Sticky and sat down beside him. The four men at the bar noticed these two. Lem Elder drank only half of his liquor, wiped his lips with the back of his hand and declared himself out of tobacco.

"Be back in a minute," he said, and went out. At the doorway he almost bumped into Frank Allenby, who was coming in. The three men at the bar turned to look at Allenby, and those at the games hesitated in their play long enough to listen.

"Harry is conscious," stated Allenby wearily. "But he refuses to tell us who shot him."

The crowd murmured their wonderment, and none of them saw Hashknife and Sleepy, muddy from their long trip, come in through the rear of the room. They came down behind a roulette layout, where half a dozen players were grouped, and stopped.

"Does he know who shot him?" asked Forty Dollar.

Swan River entered as Forty Dollar spoke.

"I'll bet he does," said Swan River. "He's protectin' somebody. If it was an even break gun-fight, he don't need to be afraid to tell who got him."

"Are yuh sure he's conscious?" asked Pinon Meade.

"Yeah, he's conscious," nodded Swan River. "It's the queerest deal I've ever been up against."

"Most deals look queer," said Hashknife, coming toward the bar. His face was splashed with mud and his clothes were sticky with the same substance. The crowd centered their attention on him now.

"Where you been, Hashknife?" asked Forty Dollar.

"Ridin' in the mud," grinned Hashknife. He turned to Sam Bass— "There's some low places on yore road that yuh ought to bridge. A little rain makes a swamp out of 'em. My bronc turned over in one of 'em."

"In my road?" queried Sam Bass.

"Yeah—out thataway. I don't blame yuh for wantin' to sell out. If I had that kind of a road——"

"Who wants to sell out?" Thus Sam Bass.

"You. Frosty told me he was buyin' yuh outtonight."

"Frosty?" Sam was both surprized and indignant.

"That's why he wanted to wake Frosty up," declared Forty Dollar. "I'll betcha forty dollars that's the reason."

Sam Bass shut his lips. He did not want every one to know that he was selling out. Clayton adjusted his necktie and started to walk away from the bar.

"Better stay where yuh are, Clayton,"

advised Hashknife. "You ain't goin' no place, yuh know."

"What do you mean?" Clayton turned and stared at Hashknife, as though wondering what had been meant by that remark. But he stepped back against the bar.

"I was just thinkin' about somethin' that might interest yuh," smiled Hashknife. "It happened over two years ago."

"Two years ago?" questioned Clayton. "What do you know about anything that happened here two years ago, Hartley?"

Hashknife laughed and shifted his feet.

"Some folks might call it fortune tellin', Clayton. Didn't you know that I could see into the past?"

"What kind of bunk is he talkin' anyway?" asked Sam Bass.

"Do yuh want me to demonstrate what I mean?" asked Hashknife.

"Hop to it," laughed Forty Dollar. "We'll all listen."

"All right. Now I'm goin' into a trance. Watch me closely."

The games had all ceased and every one was interested. Hashknife's expression did not change, except that he looked more serious. Then he began:

"I can see two men ridin' through the hills. Down in a swale a man is squattin' beside a little fire. He has two cows hog-tied near him. There's a runnin'-iron and an old fry-pan on the fire. He takes the hot fry-pan and vents the brands on the right shoulders of the animals. He comes back to the fire, takes the runnin'-iron and draws a brand on each animal, just above where he has vented the original brands.

"Then I see the two men again. They see this man at the fire and he sees them. He jumps up, runs to his horse and mounts. He has lost his hat, but don't stop to get it. The men circle the hill, tryin' to head him off.

"These two men chase him through the hills, but he is too smart for them. The two men get separated. One of them circles back to the fire, while the other keeps on after the rustler. The one that circled back, dismounts at the fire. He looks at the animals, and then he looks all around. The fire is almost out.

"He puts the pan and iron into the fire again and puts on more fuel. Then he finds the rustler's hat. I can tell by his face that he knows who owns that hat. I can't see what he did with the hat, but it disappears from the picture.

"When the pan is hot again he vents the brand that the rustler put on. It is a big vent now, almost coverin' the shoulder of both cows. Then he takes the runnin'-iron and draws a brand on each cow's right hip. Now I can see him scatter the fire, look all around, and begin to look the cows all over again.

"Then I see the other man ride back there, and they are both talking. Now they ride away. I think they are talkin' about leavin' the cows there for evidence."

Hashknife shook his head quickly and grinned.

"How do yuh all like that picture?"

STICKY and Hank Bell had got to their feet, staring at Hashknife, wondering what he meant, where he had secured this information. Clayton's mouth was half-open and he was breathing like a man suffering from a bad cold.

"What does he mean?" whispered Allenby. "I was one of those men—the one who kept on after the——"

"What kind of foolishness is this?" demanded Clayton. "I was the other man, and there wasn't anything like——"

Hank Bell was coming forward, staring at Clayton, who drew away from him.

"Hold everythin', Hank," advised Hashknife. "I'd advise everybody to hold quiet. This is ——"

Lem Elder came in through the open doorway and was half-way to the bar before he realized that the room was as quiet as a grave. He stopped suddenly, looking quickly around. His lips were twisted into a snarl and the skin seemed drawn tightly across his cheeks.

He looked at Hashknife, who was grinning at him, and his right hand opened and closed spasmodically.

"And that wasn't all of the picture," said Hashknife slowly. "I might ask Lem Elder to stand perfectly still. Yuh see it was like this. Allenby wanted to hire a detective. Clayton knew this; so he talked Allenby into lettin' him get one.

"Clayton wrote a letter to a feller by the name of Seeley. Seeley didn't last long. That was a mistake, I reckon. He wasn't supposed to be shot, but the party who shot him thought it was the right thing to do. I've got the letter that Clayton wrote to Seeley."

"What has that letter got to do with it?"

asked Clayton. "I don't care who reads that letter."

"You should 'a' asked Seeley to destroy it," replied Hashknife. "That letter plumb ruined things for you, Clayton."

"Ruined things?" Clayton's voice was hoarse. He was afraid, but was trying to bluff. "Where—how did it ruin things?"

"Some folks don't read between the lines, Clayton—I did."

"Between the lines?" Clayton's voice faltered.

"Yeah. Bud Bell went to the penitentiary, as innocent as I was of that charge. You knew it, Clayton. You was the man who came back to that fire and put on the HB brand. You knew who the rustler was. It gave you a hold over him and it put you in a position to steal Allenby's cattle.

"With the help of these men you stole, shipped and sold all those Half-Circle Cross cows. The men who held up that train stole those two HB horses to make their getaway on, because the horses were so marked that there could be no mistake.

"You shared in that holdup. I don't know why Elkins, the stage driver, was killed, but he probably tried for his gun when June Allenby accidentally rode in on the holdup. I forgot to ask her about it."

"Ask her about it?" parroted Allenby wonderingly.

"She's over at the hotel by this time," said Hashknife. "I found her at——"

"Look out!" snapped Lem Elder. "By ——, they're both over there, Sam! We're stuck!"

It took Lem Elder's statement to electrify Clayton and the 27A outfit. Clayton threw himself away from the bar, drawing a gun from a shoulder holster, while Sam Bass, Pinon Meade and Lem Elder shifted separately, each one streaking for his gun.

But they were caught between two fires. At the door was Hank Bell and Sticky Clay, blocking their exit in that direction, while Hashknife and Sleepy prevented them from going out the rear.

Clayton was dead on his feet before his gun was out of the holster. From beside the roulette layout, Sleepy was shooting slow and carefully, while Hashknife flung himself against the end of the bar and shifted his gun from man to man, as he emptied it.

Sam Bass went down, and across him fell Lem Elder, flinging his arms wide and knocking Pinon Meade back against the bar, where he sagged for a moment before going down in a crumpled heap.

The room was filled with powder smoke until faces and forms were mere indistinct things. The crowd had had no chance for a getaway, but now they vaulted the bodies and ran outside, while those from the other saloons and business places met them with a volley of questions.

Sticky Clay had been hit twice, but not badly enough to make him want a doctor. Hashknife's right cheek was bleeding from a splinter which had been thrown from the bar, but Sleepy had escaped without a scratch.

The crowd, realizing that the fight was over, came crowding back in, questioning, coughing, wondering what it was all about. Swan River and Forty Dollar did not stampede with the crowd, and it was Swan River who first examined the four victims. Sam Bass was the only one alive, still conscious, but fading fast.

"Shut up!" roared Swan River. "Sam's tryin' to whisper and I can't hear him."

Sam Bass was making a valiant effort to say something, but the words were slow in coming. The crowd grew silent, as Sam's tongue began to function.

"Money—all—in—valises," he whispered. "Goin'—away—tonight. Sorry—" He swallowed thickly. "Sorry—shot—Elkins. He—went—for—gun. Pinon killed Seeley. I—guess—that's—all."

"I guess that's enough," said Swan River slowly, as he got to his feet and turned to Hashknife. "I take off my hat to you, Hartley. I dunno how in —— you figured all this out, but you did."

"It wasn't so hard," said Hashknife wearily, looking at the empty gun in his hand. "That letter was the key to it all."

He drew out the letter and spread it on the bar.

"Skip the first line and read every other one," he said.

Swan River leaned closer and read—

Dear Jim:
Frank Allenby, the biggest cattleman in Moolock, is
up against a very dangerous proposition and needs help.
It looks like a plain case of spite work by somebody and
you can make five thousand dollars for a few days work.
This gang of rustlers are able to pull off big jobs
and get away without the slightest chance of anyone
detecting them. Your work must be done without anyone
knowing who you are; sabe?
I will explain everything to you when you get here.
You will like Allenby. If you can't take this job, Jim, it
will disappoint me greatly. If you come, keep it dark, or it
might make things very bad. Wire your decision. Sincerely
Ed

"And that's what Clayton meant for Seeley to read, eh?" asked Forty Dollar.

Hashknife nodded. "Yeah, it seems that it was, Forty. If yuh notice, he had all the lines pretty even, and left plenty of room at the margins. I kinda wondered about it all bein' so kinda regular; so I got to skippin' around for the answer. I've heard of things like this bein' done before.

"I got to findin' out a few things about Bud Bell's case, and I heard about the rustler ventin' the whole shoulder of them two cows. That wasn't accordin' to Hoyle, and there must 'a' been a reason. The 27A Outfit brand on the right shoulder.

"There was the rustler without a hat, if yuh remember. If Clayton found that hat belonged to some one he wanted to protect or put the deadwood onto, what could be easier. But he first had to blot out that other brand on the shoulder and put one on the hip. The HB brands on the hip, and the HB was already in bad with the Half-Circle Cross. Does it look easier now?"

"——, it sounds good," agreed Swan River, scratching his head. "But that was kinda flimsy evidence."

"Worse evidence than that sent Bud Bell to prison. Somebody stole three hundred head of stock out of a loadin' pen the night we came to Moolock. The stock cars came too late to load the night before; so they had to leave the cattle in the pens. Sam Bass got them cars, didn't he? I started guessin' from there.

"They wasn't makin' money enough off Allenby's stock; so they started holdin' up trains and stages. They had to steal June Allenby to save themselves. Down in the dust of that road I found a red bead. It was just a ordinary bead—like them that ornament the pockets on Sam Bass's vest. It wasn't much, but it pointed the way.

"Me and Sleepy found June in the cellar at the 27A ranch tonight. Bud Bell went lookin' for her and got knocked on the head.

"They put him into the cellar with her, and nailed the door tight. I killed their cook. He knew that his cake was all dough; so he went for his gun. He had eighteen hundred dollars in his valise. I reckon that about closes the chapter."

"June is across the street?" asked Allenby. He had been in sort of a trance.

"Yeah, she's over there," said Sleepy. "They didn't hurt her."

Allenby whirled and ran out. Bud came in. He was dirty and bloody, but he knew that now he could look every man in the face. His convict brand had been wiped away.

"They told me about it, Hartley," he said, as he looked at the four men on the floor. "I dunno how it was all done, but I'm glad. I'm not much on thankin' anybody."

"You don't need to thank me, Bud, 'cause yo're welcome."

The doctor arrived on the scene and Hashknife walked outside with Sleepy and Forty Dollar.

OVER at the hotel, June Allenby was holding an impromptu reception, assisted by her father. As soon as Allenby saw Hashknife he left the crowd and came straight to him.

"Hartley, I haven't even thanked you yet. I have had so many shocks lately that I'm not responsible for what I am doing. June has told me something of how you found her. My ——, man, you don't know what you have done for me. I've got my girl back, and Harry is going to live. I tell you, I could shout for joy."

"Go ahead," Hashknife smiled wearily.

June was coming to them, holding out her hand to Hashknife.

"I can thank you now," she said simply.

"Yo're welcome, Miss Allenby." He smiled at her and turned to her father, "If you want to thank me real hard, Allenby, go over and make yore peace with Hank Bell. You've done him an awful wrong—and this is the time to right it."

"Yes, I'll do that," said Allenby slowly. "I owe him a lot of apologies, Hartley. Perhaps I should apologize to the whole world. Before I go, I would like to ask you a question. Who was the man who was branding the cattle—the man whose crime was placed on Bud Bell?"

Hashknife squinted painfully for a moment. It seemed that he was trying to remember. He looked at June, who was staring at him, her eyes pleading.

"That man," he hesitated. "That man was Pinon Meade, I reckon."

"I see," Allenby nodded quickly. "I'm going over to ask Bud Bell and his father to forgive me, and then I'm going to write you each a check."

Allenby fairly ran across toward the Elk saloon and June came to Hashknife, placing a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Hartley," she said softly, "I want to thank you for that. I guess you know why I couldn't answer your question out at the 27A ranch-house. Sam Bass told me the whole thing. Blood is thicker than justice, at a time like this. Perhaps I was thinking more of mother than of dad."

"Mebbe I was too," said Hashknife, smiling at her. "I reckon it will be all right from now on, ma'am. I was sure scared of how it might end; but it's all right now."

"Yes, it's all right now, thanks to you—you lovable liar."

Hashknife laughed softly and turned as Bud Bell came running from the saloon. He grasped Hashknife by the arm, as he said—

"Hartley, they're havin' a drink together—her dad and mine! And her dad told me to come over and take care of her, while they talked about the future. Can yuh beat that?"

"No, yuh can't," Hashknife agreed warmly. "I'm sure glad, folks. And you take care of her, Bud. She's a game little girl, and by golly, she's worth takin' care of. C'mon, Sleepy."

They turned away and walked over to the hitch-rack. It was about the only place where they would be safe from questioning tongues, and neither of them had smoked a cigaret since Hashknife had discovered the nails in the trap door at the 27A.

Neither of them spoke until their cigarets were nearly gone. The crowd at the Elk were helping to clean up the place. Frosty and Joe were on the sidewalk in front of the saloon, trying to get some one to explain what it was all about. Outside of Hashknife and Sleepy, they were the only people in Moolock who were not excited; they had slept through it all.

"Lovable liar," said Sleepy seriously, "it comes to me that there must 'a' been sort of an agreement between Sam Bass and Harry Allenby before Harry tried to misbrand them two cows."

"Yeah, I suppose," said Hashknife softly. "Allenby stinginess drove the kid to steal. Clayton saved him from the pen. Clayton could use the kid to put him in with the 27A, and together they robbed Allenby blind.

"But it seems like they kinda fell out all around. Clayton hired Seeley, without tellin' Sam Bass and Harry. Seeley was the victim of a mistake. Probably Harry told Bass that Seeley was a detective, not knowin' that Clayton had hired him. Mebbe Clayton and Seeley had somethin' framed up for themselves. Clayton had trouble with 'em, probably over June's part of the deal, and one of 'em tried to kill Clayton.

"I reckon that Harry was dangerous to their game. He drank and talked too much. Very likely he knew where June was, and threatened to talk if they didn't let her loose. That was why they tried to kill him. It kinda looks like they all knew that this three-handed game was a losin' proposition.

"When I heard that Sam Bass was sellin' out to Frosty Welcome tonight, I knew that my cards were all aces. It was just another case of too many cooks, Sleepy. The 27A outfit had it all fixed to skip out of the country tonight. I reckon they were all goin' to pull out on that midnight train. I had to guess at quite a lot of things, but I had enough straight dope to tie up the weak spots."

Hashknife threw away his cigaret and leaned against the hitch-rack.

"Sleepy, do yuh know the only way to be half-way successful as a crook?"

"Yeah," nodded Sleepy. "I know two ways."

"No, yuh don't, cowboy; there's only one way."

"There's two, Hashknife. One way is to play a lone hand."

"All right," agreed Hashknife. "What's the other one?"

"To kill you when you first show up in the country."

Hashknife laughed softly and began rolling another cigaret.

"That's appreciation, pardner. I think more of that than I do of Allenby's check. It ain't my policy to shift guilt onto a dead man; but I reckon it won't hurt Pinon Meade's soul to have an extra cattle rustlin' charge on the books against him. It won't hurt him, but it will save a lot of heart-aches down here; so I'll let 'em chalk one more lie against my record. June knows the truth, and mebbe that'll keep Harry goin' straight. It kinda levels things out for Hank and Bud; so I reckon we come out just about even."

They left the hitch-rack, going back

toward the store, and ran into Swan River Smith.

"Been lookin' all over for yuh," he said. "Allenby wants yuh. Him and Hank Bell had six drinks apiece and Allenby is goin' to buy out the HB outfit, make Bud foreman and—here's a couple of checks to give yuh—and yo're going' to be best man at a weddin', and —— only knows what they ain't figured out.

"Them two jiggers shore do work fast. You'd think they was long separated brothers; honest, yuh would. Somebody told Harry how it all came out, and he wants yuh to come down right away, and—say, you fellers can have Moolock, if yuh want it."

Hashknife took the checks and handed one to Sleepy.

"We'll be over there as soon as we put up our horses, Swan River."

"Well, all right. Make it as soon as yuh can."

Hashknife and Sleepy hurried to the rack, mounted their horses, and Hashknife led the way out of town, heading south, passing the livery-stable.

"Where are we goin' to put up our horses?" asked Sleepy.

"Probably in the next town we come to," grinned Hashknife. "Best man at a weddin', eh? Not me, cowboy. I'm huntin' for a place where I can settle down in peace. Moolock don't need us at a weddin'."

And so they faded out of the Moolock country, heading into unknown ranges, leaving behind them a lot of grateful people, who waited for them in vain.

They had brought happiness to those who deserved it, and to one, who, in the eyes of society, possibly did not deserve it. But the eyes of society were of little consequence to Hashknife and Sleepy—the Lovable Liar and his innocent-eyed partner. The checks were for twenty-five hundred dollars each. All of which, as Hashknife remarked, proved that Allenby did not get financially overjoyed.

"Thassall right," stated Sleepy, as they drifted along under the stars. "We're lucky to get anythin', Hashknife."

"How's that, Sleepy?"

"He offered the money for a conviction."

Which he did not get, and which also proves that Allenby was just a little excited. He might have made it a point to argue over.

The Silver Lining

By H. C. Montee

COLONEL OWEN B. SKINNER, one time of Texas, some time of the American Expeditionary Forces, Air Service, and now Commander-in-Chief of the Air Forces of the Grand Armies of China, turned uneasily in his cot and silently cursed the bugler. That slant-eyed individual was lustily blowing the Chinese version of "I Can't Get 'em Up." Colonel Skinner's spare frame stirred restlessly.

The impudent notes of the bugle were rolling down the curtain of wakefulness on a sunny scene in a Texas cottonfield. The colonel buried his face in his hard pillow in a last attempt to shut out the blatant notes. He hoped the bugler would choke on the flat notes. Why was the fool blowing his noisy toy at this hour of the night anyway? It wasn't light yet.

But the bugler did not choke. Instead, he appeared to be encouraged by the sound of his preliminary notes, and blew with more vigor.

The bugle and the chill air of north China's early morning were too much for the cottonfield. It faded out and left the colonel staring open eyed at the tent roof. Almost resignedly he looked at his watch. Half-past five! And this was the day of the "big push."

He slipped into his clothes and hurriedly strode across the parade ground flanking the landing field. His long sword clanked against his heels. Skinner hated that sword, but Marshal Tang Tsing-lo, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Armies of North China insisted that officers wear their swords at all times. Skinner had protested in vain that air force officers did not wear the things.

Skinner surveyed his air force ruefully. It was a far cry from the Western Front in France to this man's civil war in China, he reflected.

The total air forces of the Grand Armies comprised one old bomber, somewhat the worse for wear, Colonel Skinner and one staff sergeant mechanician who knew nothing of aeronautics or mechanics. The old plane was not armed. It had been a part of a flying circus, gone broke, and was almost as harmless as it was worn.

But it was Marshal Tang's surprize trump card. He had given Skinner a large supply of hand grenades which he hoped would, when dropped from the plane on to the heads of the ignorant coolie soldiers of his adversary's lines, start a rout which Tang's troops could follow up to advantage.

Skinner had contrived a surprize of his own. He knew that to do any damage with hand grenades the ship must be flown uncomfortably close to the ground, and that a few machine-guns in action as anti-aircraft weapons might make the air untenable. So he had rigged what he termed "alarm clocks" to sling beneath his plane.

These were ten empty oil cases, each loaded with fifty pounds of dynamite and fitted with detonators. He had cut a series of slots in the floor of his cockpit and fitted each with a foot trip.

The alarm clocks were slung on loops of

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wire each, and the loops hooked through the slots in the floor to the release pedals, so that Skinner could drop them at will. The construction of these had been a great secret. Even Marshal Tang did not know of their existence.

As they contained no shrapnel or missiles of any kind Skinner did not expect to wreak very much actual damage with them, but he regarded them as more potent hair raisers than the puny hand-grenades with which the marshal had equipped the plane.

"All right Wong. Turn her over," Skinner commanded, climbing into the cockpit.

Wong, a big six-footer of Mongol-Manchu mixture, jumped with unwonted alacrity to the propeller. For once in his life he was stirred out of his habitual calm. He had looked forward to this day with more pleasureful anticipation than had Skinner, and his large oval face shone with excitement as he reached for the propeller blade. The longed-for opportunity of showering down bombs on the heads of an enemy whom he hated without reason was at hand.

"We catchee fly now Gen'al?" he asked eagerly.

It mattered not to Wong that Skinner's narrow shoulders supported a pair of silver eagles obtained from an American colonel at Tientsin. In so far as Wong was concerned, Skinner was "the general," all argument to the contrary notwithstanding.

"No. We will have some breakfast first. But we will try this bus out before we sling those alarm clocks under her. We don't want to bump with those things hanging on to us."

Wong signaled "on" and Skinner pressed the switch. Wong gave a mighty heave on the blade and waited for the expected explosion. The motor missed fire and Wong's life was spared—again.

"You darned fool, Wong!" Skinner swore at him. "How many times must I tell you to get out of the way when you crank? You'll get killed by standing that way sometime."

The next time the spark caught and the big motor answered with a roar. A moment later the plane taxied swiftly into the soft, rosy flush on the horizon for a beautiful take off.

It was not yet sun-up on the ground, but a faint flush had appeared on the horizon as a warning that the sun was soon to follow. At a thousand feet the red ball was visible around the curve of the earth. It sent up broad, slanting rays which the whirring propeller cut into silver gleamings and cast these back into the cockpit.

Skinner laughed with the simple joy of being alive, and waved at the camp below. It was such a wonderful day—perfect for flying. To prove it he did a series of loops, terminating in an Immelmann. He saw the camp staring open-mouthed at these antics, and he laughed again.

"Why these fellows don't know a darned thing about war," he mused. "Just imagine a headquarters camp in France leaving its breakfast to stare at some fool pilot trying to break his neck! These chaps are as dead above the shoulders as that old boy sleeping under the big mound by the flying field, and by all accounts he has been dead over a thousand years."

THE mound of which Skinner spoke was but one of thousands such which dot the entire countryside of China, for there the dead are not interred. The body is placed upon the surface of the ground and a mound is built over it. The greater the renown of the departed, the greater the mound built above the remains.

And as each family buries its dead on its own land instead of in a common cemetery, the entire landscape is speckled with burial mounds.

The mound at the end of the flying field was larger than any of its neighbors, and had long served as a landmark for the surrounding country. Beneath it rested the bones of one Shan Wang-ti, illustrious patriot during the reign of Tai Sung, and direct ancestor of Marshal Tang Tsing-lo.

The spirit of Ancestor Shan was supposed to extend a benign influence over the fortunes of Marshal Tang, which accounted for the headquarters camp location seventy miles from the actual battlefront. Every morning the marshal led his staff to worship at the foot of the mound.

When Skinner headed for the landing field they were there, a hundred or more gold braided and epauletted figures, standing bareheaded and stiffly formal in the first rays of the sun while the marshal solemnly requested the aid of the ancestral spirit in the battle about to begin.

Unfortunately, Skinner had found the big mound convenient as a landing mark, and did so this morning without thinking.

At a thousand feet he cut off the motor and nosed the ship down straight at the mound. There was a hurried upturning of startled faces and then a mad stampede for safety. Skinner drew an amused smile and flattened out at two hundred feet for a short glide and a perfect three point landing.

"Fifteen minutes for breakfast, Wong, and then be here to help load these things," he announced as he leaped out of the cockpit and trotted to his own tent.

Without stopping to wash up he dropped to a stool before his well loaded field table and helped himself liberally to roast duck and the sheep-herder bread which he had taught his Chinese cook to make.

An orderly appeared at the door and gave an indifferent salute.

"Big Master talkee Melikan Gen'al come tent side chop chop," he announced.

Skinner was surprized and irritated. What could Old Chin Whiskers—that was his own private name for the marshal—want now? His maps, plans and orders were about as complete as they could be. Perhaps there was a change in plans.

Entering the marshal's tent, still chewing on the last mouthful of food, he found the full headquarters staff assembled. It was a strange galaxy in yards and yards of gold braid, huge epaulets, plumes and swords, and ill-fitting uniforms. All were standing except the marshal who sat behind a large field table, his features puffed up more than usual with suppressed rage.

He was a huge Manchu with a scraggly mustache and a few stray whiskers wandering away from the folds of his double chin. Small black eyes were set in a plain of bronze colored fat and these glittered as they enencountered Skinner's direct gaze. The younger officer snapped into a smart headquarters salute which was answered with the wave of a large yellow hand.

Marshal Tang opened the conversation with a roar. He could not speak English, but Skinner had heard the same tones used at other headquarters. When the marshal had spent his fury one of the staff officers bowed to the marshal and then to Skinner.

"Colonel Skeener," he translated in a high, nervous voice, "His Excellency, the most Honorable and Worshipful Commander has ordered that you fly no more over the Ancestral Tomb, on penalty of court martial. You have insulted the person of His Excellency and offended the spirit of the Worshipful Ancestor. His Excellency says no good can come of it. The Ancestral spirit will desert the Tang standards and today's battle will be lost.

"His Excellency the Worshipful Commander is angry, and instructs me to remind you that foreign soldiers, and His Excellency says that they were Americans, violated the Ancestral Tomb many years ago when they marched to Peking. Since then the Imperial Land has known nothing but misfortune, and only misfortune can come of your offense to the Ancestral Spirit by flying over its tomb."

Skinner was afraid his eyes would betray the amusement he felt in this harangue. He maintained a straight face, however, while he sought for some explanation. The marshal, as if reading his thoughts, exploded into another series of roars.

"His Excellency has nothing more to say," the interpreter officer explained meekly. "You go now to attack the enemy."

* * *

"JUST imagine having a plane in the same neighborhood with ideas like those!" the colonel muttered to himself as he crossed the parade ground to his hangar. "No wonder they have civil war in this darned country!"

The air was too bracing, however, for one to remain long at cross purposes with life, and Skinner found himself humming a soliloquy on life which he had adopted as his own.

"Every cloud has a silver lining.
When your luck ain't good
Don't go complai-ning.
It makes it worse
For to grouse and curse.
Just look for the silver lining."

The issues on trial in the war of which he was now a part were matters on which Skinner shared a supreme ignorance with every field officer and most of the staff officers of both armies.

When he joined Marshal Tang's armies he had not been in a position to inquire too closely as to the issues involved. For Marshal Tang's representative had found Skinner at a time when the black clouds of fortune had no silver lining in view.

Skinner had been traveling through the Orient with a flying circus, and gate receipts had not been as heavy as the promoters had anticipated. During a dull week he had taken leave to see the sights at Peking. When he returned to Tientsin he found the circus had departed. The boss had left a letter for Skinner which read:

> Dear Skinner:
>
> Sorry you weren't here to go with us. The game is up. We are broke, and have sailed on the Tympan Maru for 'Frisco. Didn't have cash enough to square up your pay, but have left the old biplane, the new motor and all spare parts for you. Hope you can use it some way or sell it. Have fixed up your hotel bill until today at noon.
>
> Good Luck.
>
> CRANEY.

At the end of a week when Skinner's spirits and credit were at ten points below zero he had been delighted with a commission as colonel in Marshal Tang's armies.

He had since installed the new powerful motor in the old plane and put the old ship into really first class condition. It was a poor fighting machine at best, but as long as the enemy had no combat planes it would do for the purposes the marshal intended it.

The chief of the air forces smiled as he worked at the slinging of his aerial bombs. He would show Old Chin Whiskers whether the Ancestral Spirit had any part in this battle. He would show these old fossils a side of war they had never experienced. He had dynamite enough in the cans to blow up a good sized country side.

"Keep away from here, you!" he warned when Wong proffered his assistance. "You'll just about blunder around and set one of these things off."

Wong grinned.

"Make plenty boom bang, huh?"

The big Manchu's enthusiasm was infectious, and Skinner found his own heart beating faster as he completed the hanging of the last of his alarm clocks.

"All right, Wong, we're off!" he shouted joyously. "See if you can crank it this time without getting killed."

Wong cranked with the skill of an old airman. He was so excited he would have neglected to buckle his safety strap had Skinner not reminded him sharply. After a minute of warming up the motor roared confidently and the heavily laden plane shot forward to a thrilling take-off. Skinner had to swerve slightly to avoid passing directly over the ancestral tomb.

"I'd like to drop a clock on the darned thing," he muttered, looking over the side at the huge mound, "just to wake the old bird up. Seems to me his spirit has been asleep too long as it is."

The ship headed south and climbed to twenty-five hundred feet. In the distance below he sighted the headquarters cars strung out in a speeding line, and later he saw the plumed heads crane upward as he passed over them.

In another half hour he was over the fighting lines, though there was little to designate them as such. A mile apart were two irregular lines of brown-clad men sitting or lolling on the ground while little columns of smoke at intervals spoke of a meal being cooked.

"Huh!" Skinner grunted. "I thought this was the day of the big push and here these fellows are still at breakfast!"

At this time the battle front stretched roughly from Pachow, outside of Tientsin, down the right bank of the Grand Canal almost to the great Hwang-Ho, across to Taming-fu and Tzechow where the railway was cut, and thence north-westward to Shichow and the Hwang-Ho again.

Along this stretch of some three hundred miles, two great chieftains were battling with a half million men each for priority in the collection of customs duties. The ostensible issue was whether an inoffensive, timid boy in a secluded palace should be emperor of the land, or whether a weak, vacilating old man should continue at the head of a would-be parliamentary government.

Neither of those vitally interested parties had the strength or the inclination to battle. But two great military chieftains who were law unto themselves had taken up the gage.

Marshal Tang Tsing-lo championed the cause of the boy emperor while the equally great military strategist, Marshal Pu Tingsze fought for the republic.

The fighting was not too severe on either side. Occasionally one or the other made a short drive, but for the most part the engagements were intermittent. Neither army was equipped with heavy artillery, and both had only meager supplies of field guns, machine-guns and ammunition for both.

SKINNER dropped to a thousand feet and swept over the Pu lines. Soldiers along both lines were now running about excitedly pointing to the plane. One bold spirit in the Pu line leveled his rifle and fired at the soaring plane. His action was immediately imitated by dozens of others. The whole line broke into a crackle of rifle reports.

"Hooray!" yelled Skinner, nudging Wong. "The big push is on! Let 'em have it, Wong!"

Wong pulled the pin of a grenade and dropped the missile. Both men leaned over the side and watched it fall. It burst in a white cloud of smoke a hundred feet from the ground.

The troops below were evidently mystified and ceased firing for the moment.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Wong was casting the grenades over the side with machine-like regularity. The troops below were growing uneasy under this barrage when a machine-gun came to their rescue. With its nose pointed to the sky the gun spread a blast of lead fan-wise in the general direction of the plane.

"We'll stop that darned sudden," Skinner muttered as he headed for the offending gun.

Wong went into action again with his hand grenades, but their burstings were drowned out in a general roar of rifles. A mile back of the line a battery of field guns had come into action, but Skinner knew he had little to fear from that. The machine-gun was the greatest liability. Just one bullet through one of the alarm clocks and the plane would disappear in white smoke.

Almost directly over the spitting gun, Skinner pressed the first release and held his breath. He had never had an opportunity to test the makeshift mechanism. The trip worked and the square can glistened downward through the sparkling sun.

"That'll give you something to think about," Skinner muttered as he banked sharply to watch the descent of the bomb.

He had not long to wait for results. The bomb struck within fifty feet of the machine-guns and flattened out in a pall of white smoke which hid everything for a moment. The concussion was terrific. When the smoke cleared a little the whole sector below was covered with running men.

Some were running drunkenly, staggering and falling now and then, to run on all fours for a short distance before regaining an upright position. These were the soldiers who had been nearest the explosion. Apparently no one had been killed, for there were no bodies lying about. The rout had begun.

TWO hours later the plane limped its way toward the landing field with three of the motor's cylinders completely dead. It had been a wonderful day and the bombing had been a huge success.

Tang's troops, as well as the Pu men had bolted from the first bombs, but their officers had finally held them and forced them in an advance. When they understood the purpose of the air men the infantry had roared up their applause.

Along a fifty mile front the Pu men were in full retreat. They had never experinced anything like the explosives dropped from the Tang plane, and had bolted like rabbits. The victorious Tang men had pursued the fugitives across the Grand Canal and far into territory which had long been under the dominance of Marshal Pu.

But the day had nearly ended disastrously for Skinner and Sergeant Wong. With but two of the alarm clocks remaining on their slings and when the airmen were at the height of their work, the motor had commenced missing. A glance at his dials had told Skinner that the oil feed had clogged.

He quickly pressed the two remaining releases and headed the plane for camp, working with the oil feed as he went. At the same time he searched the surrounding country for a possible landing place, but the landscape was inhospitable to a machine of the air. It was made up of soggy little irrigated fields and huge mounds where "ancestral spirits" abode. Only a wild duck might hope to land there without injury.

The motor grew worse as they continued, and by the time the brown tents and the open spaces of the headquarters camp appeared in the distance it was running intermittently. The ship had lost momentum and Skinner feared a crash at any moment. He nosed down directly for the landing field, using the Ancestral Tomb as his landmark and pilot.

"I guess the Old Boy won't mind our flying over him this once," he mused. "He'd probably reach up and pat us on the shoulder if he could."

Suddenly Wong came to life. He had been peering over the side at the flitting fields below, when with a shout that was something more than a cry of alarm, he pointed excitedly below the plane. Skinner, strained far out over the side of the cockpit and looked down. His heart nearly stopped beating.

The last of the alarm clocks had not entirely released. One of the wire loops had broken and had run through the release trip until the knot was reached and there it stuck. The other end, run through the side of the can and well twisted would not let go, and the case with its fifty pounds of dynamite swung drunkenly at the end of the single wire, six feet below the body of the plane.

They were gliding steadily down to the flying field, and Skinner knew that he had not the power to straighten out or to climb.

He also realized that unless he could loose the alarm clock within the next sixty seconds it would drag the ground and detonate. He worked frantically at the release, but the knot in the wire had imbedded itself solidly.

If he could only push the thing down through the slot in the floor or break the wire, he thought. His sword might do. Thanks to Marshal Tang's insistence that he carry the sword at all times, he had it hung on two small hooks in the cockpit.

He snatched the weapon from the scabbard and cut at the wire. But the slot through the floor was narrow and there was little room to work. He strained at the blade in an effort to saw the wire in two, and broke the weapon in half. Skinner groaned. This to happen when he had been so near success!

He had not time to look to see how near they were to earth, but he expected the bomb to strike something at any time and blow plane and men to bits. He stabbed at the wire with the broken blade and succeeded in cutting some notches on the wire.

Then the bomb swung slowly back, and the blade slipped between the wire and the side of the slot in the floor. As the weight of the bomb carried it forward again the wire drew taut over the edge of the blade and snapped.

Skinner had a glimpse through the slot in the floor of the falling tin before the upward force of the explosion all but turned the plane in a somersault. Only the momentum they had gained in the downward glide gave Skinner control enough to flatten out for a bumpy but safe landing.

The explosion had shaken two or three score of officers and orderlies from their tents, and these stood about in groups at a safe distance as Skinner and Wong climbed from the plane.

The rank and file of Tang's army had not yet become accustomed to the flying contraption of the foreigner, and they preferred to give it a wide berth. They were all talking excitedly at once and staring alternately from the plane to the gray pall of smoke where the bomb had exploded.

The two air men exchanged glances and grinned when they felt the solid earth beneath them.

"Wow! That was a close call!" exclaimed Skinner, wiping his forehead with a grimy hand. "Let's go back and see what damage is done."

Wong started with Skinner with a springy step, but as they approached the now thinning smoke his step grew less light. At last, when they could see where the alarm clock had struck, Wong halted abruptly.

Skinner glanced at his companion and saw that he was trembling, his eyes wide with horror, surveying a gaping hole in the side of the Ancestral Tomb. The alarm clock had struck on the side of the huge mound and had torn away nearly a half of it. Pieces of sod and freshly turned earth lay all about them.

"Good lord!" Skinner exclaimed and drew a long whistle. "This is a pickle! Guess I'd better be gone when Old Chin Whiskers gets back. He'll probably go straight up in the air when he sees this! Let's see what we did to the Old Boy. We must have given him a deuce of a jar."

He spoke only to himself, however. Wong was going in the opposite direction as rapidly as his legs would carry him.

Skinner laughed shortly.

"That old Ancestral Spirit sure has this bunch buffaloed. Wonder if we jarred loose any bones?"

THE KICKED idly at some of the clods of wet earth thrown from the grave. One of these rolled away before him but did not fall to pieces as the others had. He picked it up and examined it.

It appeared to have been a tin box of some kind, rusted and caked with the damp earth. Wondering, Skinner crushed the thing in his hands, and it broke apart easily, the frail walls were so rusted, leaving a soggy piece of rag in his hands.

Curiosity mastered the first involuntary start to drop the rag as something unclean. It must have been put in the box for some reason, he argued, examining the thing more closely. There were some letters or marks painted on it. Skinner smoothed the rag on his knee and studied it intently. He could make out some of the printing.

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The rag was evidently a piece torn from a soldier's poncho. He remembered that Marshal Tang had said the American soldiers, on their march to the relief of the Peking Legations during the Boxer trouble, had violated the grave. Some soldier had torn this piece from his poncho and buried it in a tin box—perhaps a cartridge box—in the grave.

"Terrance P. Flynn, 4th Oregon Volunteers, U. S. A.," Skinner mused.

"I wonder where you are now? I'll bet I made a bigger hole in the Old Boy's tomb than you did, anyway," he laughed, getting to his feet and going to the edge of the mount to examine the hole made by the bomb.

The tomb looked as if a steam shovel had been put to work there.

There were no bones in evidence, but the jagged walls of yellow and brown earth stared at him sullenly, while odd-shaped clods protested dumbly against this rude disturbance of the dead. There were hundreds of these clods lying about, and Skinner noticed idly that they were all of approximately uniform size and shape. This aroused his curiosity and he picked up one of the clods to examine it.

He uttered a short exclamation of surprize at the weight of the thing. It was as heavy as lead. He squeezed the lump between his hands and the dirt fell away easily, leaving an odd, shoe-shaped brick. He squeezed this with all his might but it would not give. He tried another lump and found a similar brick. He knocked the two together and the sound was of two rocks being pounded together.

"Well I'll be darned! Now what the ——"

He got out his knife and whittled into one of the lumps. The edge cut away easily, leaving a clean, silver-white surface.

Skinner sat down heavily.

"Now how the deuce—" he began, when the answer to his question came to him.

The Chinese mint at Tientsin had been burned by artillery fire during the Boxer trouble, and much of its contents had been carried away by the allied soldiers. This grave was a landmark for miles around and one Terrance P. Flynn of the 4th Oregon Volunteers had chosen it as a cache for his loot. For some reason he had been unable to return and claim it. These odd-looking lumps were old Tientsin taels—pure silver! There were hundreds of them lying about.

Skinner scrambled to his feet and began collecting the lumps, knocking the dirt loose and piling the little silver bricks. For want of a better place, he built his pile at the bottom of the pit made by the explosion.

At the end of an hour he had collected quite a pile, and he laughed aloud as he found himself unconsciously humming:

"Every cloud has a silver lining.
When your luck ain't good
Don't go complai-ning."

"There's nothing the matter with my luck," he said aloud. "Here this old Ancestral Spirit has been sleeping in a grave with a silver lining for the past twenty years, and all the time Old Chin Whiskers and his gang have been running around the country looking for loot. Good gosh!"

In his excitement attendant on the discovery of the silver he had all but forgotten Marshal Tang.

"Guess I'd better be getting that old bus ready to go again instead of monkeying with this stuff."

BUT as he worked on the motor he maintained a sharp look out toward the Ancestral Tomb. He was afraid one of the Chinese soldiers would find greater urge in curiosity than fear and discover the pile of silver. He could have spared himself the uneasiness. Although the bombing of the ancient grave was the chief topic of conversation in camp, not one of the officers or men would have ventured near the place.

At sunset Skinner had overhauled the oiling system of the motor, drained and flushed the crank case, and refilled it with fresh oil. After that he tried out the motor and was delighted with its steady purr.

He taxied to the hangar and turned the ship around ready for a take off. It might be well to be ready for a quick get away, he reasoned. The marshal might get nasty when he heard about the bombing of Ancestor Shan's resting place.

So busy had he been with his work that he had not noticed the return to camp of the marshal and the headquarters staff. The first warning he received was the appearance of an orderly beside the plane.

"Big Master talkee come tent side chop chop," that individual announced breathlessly.

Skinner crawled from under the plane where he had been testing the struts and found himself immediately surrounded by Chinese soldiers, rifles and bayonets ready. A petty officer stepped forward and took Skinner's pistol and belt. Then they marched him off to the marshal's tent.

There he found the headquarters staff assembled about the bulky figure of the marshal in much the same manner as he had last seen them. There was a suppressed air of excitement and a sharp intaking of breath as Skinner entered, but otherwise silence.

This silence, except for the low wheeze of the marshal's heavy breathing, continued for some time. Then the big man began to rumble, and the storm of unintelligible words gained strength and volume as it progressed.

The marshal roared until he was completely out of breath. Then he paused to wheeze loudly while the dapper little interpreter put the tirade into English. Skinner all but laughed at the inoffensive tone of the interpreter voicing the marshal's storm. But the words were offensive enough.

The marshal denounced Skinner as an enemy to the spirits of the illustrious Chinese forefathers, a bungler and a fool. But for the courage and resourcefulness of the Tang officers the day would have been a rout for the Tang forces. Skinner had conspired against both armies.

He had sought to kill and to maim without distinction as to armies. Only the bravery and devotion of the Tang forces had saved the cause from complete disaster. To add to his diabolical commissions of the day Skinner had saved the last of his huge explosions to destroy the sacred Ancestral Tomb which had once before been the object of hated foreign vandalism.

Skinner was stunned. He had expected trouble over the bombing of the grave, but had thought this would be off-set by his good work of the day. Why the old son-of-a-gun! The bravery and devotion of his men! Why——

He opened his mouth for protest, but the marshal anticipated it with a roar. He continued to roar for a full minute, his face growing darker with passion as he broke into full stride. Skinner was mute before the blast which shook the tent walls. When it was all over the interpreter explained.

"His Excellency will hear no excuses. It is done. You are under arrest and will remain in your tent under guard. In the morning His Excellency will examine the Sacred Tomb and affix punishment. If the damage is irreparable you may be shot. Tomorrow you will be taken to prison to await trial."

At a signal from the interpreter the guards appeared and Skinner accompanied them to his own tent, where the guards remained on watch, one at the front and one at the rear. His tent had been rifled of everything which might possibly be used as a weapon.

For the immediate present there was dinner. In spite of the excitement his cook had arranged a wonderful meal of roast duck which Skinner attacked at once. Later there would be time enough for reflection.

He was still sitting on his cot staring out through the tent door when the first of the loot from the battlefield arrived. It was toward nine o'clock and a huge bonfire had been kindled in the center of the parade ground.

After bringing the headquarters staff to camp, the cars had returned to the field to gather in the spoils. All of the homes and towns in the newly conquered territory were systematically sacked. The food so taken was consumed by the soldiery, but the silver and valuables were commandeered by the officers and sent back to headquarters.

Gathered about the fire Skinner could make out the forms of most of the headquarters staff. Further back was the solid ring of shining faces belonging to the lesser soldiers.

Article after article was taken from the cars, examined by the firelight and passed from hand to hand, amid a babel of voices.

The guards at Skinner's tent soon manifested an interest in the proceedings. The sentry from the rear came to the tent door and conversed in low tones with his companion there. Frequently they glanced in the direction of the prisoner, and reassured by his presence, continued their conversation.

SKINNER made a great show of retiring, and dragged a wad of clothes into the cot with him. He placed his hat over his head so that he could watch the guards without their being able to see his face. After one or two more peeps at him and more conversation, one of the guards sauntered toward the fire.

In a half-hour he returned, peeped in at Skinner and took his post before the door, while the other guard made a visit to the fire. Before he returned Skinner had left his hat resting on the end of a roll of clothing between the blankets, and had slipped under the rear wall of the tent.

One-half the distance to the hangar had been covered when another car, newly arrived from the battlefield, swung up to a position by the bonfire, its strong headlights cutting two paths of bright light across the parade ground directly between Skinner and the hangar.

Skinner was flat on the ground, volubly cursing the driver of the car. Why didn't he turn off his lights? He dared not move with those swaths of light across his path.

For several minutes he lay flat, hoping the driver would extinguish the lights. Then the crowd at the fire surged around the new arrival and the paths of light were broken into odd-shaped blotches of shadows.

Keeping close to earth, Skinner crawled from shadow to shadow until he reached the wall of darkness which hid the hangar.

Once there he moved with assurance. He knew exactly where to lay hands on the things he wanted. He had filled his gas and oil tanks in the afternoon, but he put some extra cans of each in the forward cockpit. From the rear of the hangar he took a dozen grenades and stowed these in his own pit. This done, he started in to retrieve the silver from the Ancestral Tomb.

He had some difficulty in finding the water can in which to carry the silver pieces. Wong had misplaced it somewhere and he dared not use a match.

Darn Wong! The big, clumsy-footed ox, he was always doing the wrong thing. But Skinner wished he could take Wong along. Wong was a good boy, with all his faults. Wonder what they had done with Wong? He would probably get short shrift for his part in the bombing.

At this point Skinner found the water can. He stumbled over it where Wong had set the thing down almost in the middle of the hangar, kicking up a row he was sure could be heard all over the camp. He cursed Wong long and expertly as he listened for footsteps which would tell him that some one had heard the racket. But only the murmur about the camp-fire disturbed the darkness.

He had little difficulty in finding the huge mound at the end of the landing field, or in filling his can with the silver pieces. But he found on the long walk back to the hangar that he had chosen considerable of a load. The wire handle cut into his hands, and he was forced to pause for breath several times.

Then the idea of moving the plane out to the tomb occurred to him. It would have two advantages. He would not have to carry the silver so far, and in case of discovery he would have time to start his motor before any one from the camp could reach him.

It was a herculean task for one man to push the big plane so far, but at the end of two hours Skinner had accomplished it, and turned the ship around ready for a quick take-off. He had just resumed his happy task of digging the silver briquettes from the shell hole when his ear detected a movement of some kind out by the plane. Skinner held his breath and listened. Some one was moving around out there.

All of his hand grenades were in the cockpit and he had no weapon of any kind. He cursed himself for a fool for not keeping at least one grenade where he could lay hands on it. The little silver pieces would make excellent missiles, however, and he gathered a few of these to throw.

Cautiously he peered over the edge of the hole. A tall form stood by one of the wings of the ship. Skinner raised up, taking good aim with the missile. He did not want to miss the first throw.

"Gen'al!"

It was Wong's voice. His teeth were chattering with fright, but he came steadily toward the pit. Skinner nearly dropped with surprize and joy.

"Wong, you big boob! How did you get out here?" he demanded in a whisper.

"Wong catchee China boy play with

gen'al's pistol. Wong have got knife. China boy not need pistol now. Gen'al no stay tent side, mus' come grave side. Wong come too."

The big sergeant held out Skinner's belt and pistol.

"Gen'al go'way now? Dead spirits much angry, bimeby makee bad time for gen'al."

Skinner appreciated the greatness of the loyalty that had driven the big Manchu to seek him out at the tomb despite the mortal terror in which the Manchu held the ancestral spirits. At first thought he intended asking Wong to help in the handling of the silver pieces, but consideration told him it would be asking too much to ask Wong to get down in the hole in the grave or to handle anything coming out of it.

"All right, Wong. You keep watch by the plane. I'll be coming soon."

As he worked rapidly he could hear the heavy breathing of Wong by the plane. Only intense loyalty kept the big Manchu near the place, and consideration of this drove Skinner to work faster.

He estimated each canful of silver at a hundred pounds, and he had recovered five of these when Wong grunted a warning. At the time a loud shout floated out to them from the camp. The soldiers had discovered Skinner's flight, and probably the sentry whom Wong had knifed.

Skinner crawled out of the hole quickly, bringing his partially filled can. The camp was a babel of chattering and shouts. Hurrying figures were leaving the circle of the bonfire, armed with blazing torches, and the light of these flickered on the barrels of rifles carried by soldiers who followed the torchbearers.

A group raced to the hangar with their fire brands and shrilled hysterically when they found the plane was missing. They advanced cautiously over the landing field toward the Ancestral Tomb.

"I'll have to stop that," Skinner muttered.

He gathered an armful of hand grenades and ran to meet the advancing torches. When within throwing distance he cast three of the grenades as rapidly as he could pull the pins and throw.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

The blackness of the night was torn apart by the bright glare of the exploding grenades. By the light of the flashes Skinner saw that he had thrown short, but the grenades did their work. Torches and rifles were dropped in the mad stampede back toward camp.

"That'll hold you for a while," Skinner laughed shortly after the retreating figures.

But almost instantly the marshal's camp served notice that the fight was not finished. Two machine-guns on the farther side of the parade ground opened up with an enfilading fire, sweeping the field in the general direction of the tomb.

Characteristic of most night firing, it was too high to be a serious menace immediately, but Skinner knew that the gunners might cut down the elevation at any time to a disastrous level. He raced back to his waiting machine where Wong was almost paralyzed with fright.

"Think you can crank it, Wong?" he asked after he had primed the motor.

"Can do, Gen'al."

"All right, but careful. We don't want any accidents now!"

On the second compression the spark caught and the motor roared out its challenge to the Grand Armies of Northern China. The exhaust of the motor immediately drew the fire of both machine-guns and a large bloc of rifle fire. The air overhead and about them buzzed with the hum of a swarm of bees.

Skinner reached forward and patted Wong's shoulder while the motor was warming up, partly to assure his helper and partly to quiet his own nerves. He was not entirely assured himself.

Ahead of him lay the bumpy flying field with the hangar somewhere there in the darkness. He would have to guess at his speed and distance. He had never tried a take off in the dark.

The thud of a lone rifle bullet into the side of the cockpit and a flying splinter warned him that the gunners were getting the plane's position. Skinner gritted his teeth and opened the throttle. A flood of assurance swept over him as he felt the old ship ease forward on the start of its swift race across the field.

A stream of fire trailed from the exhaust pipes which the machine-gunners tried vainly to sweep with their guns. The pressure of the wind in his face told Skinner that they were moving at lifting speed.

He pulled the control stick back gently and his heart leaped exultantly as he felt the ship leave the ground. He did not know it, but he cleared the hangar roof by a scant yard. The roar of the motor and the rush of the wind drowned out the sound of the crackling guns.

They were away, and alone with the blackness of the night, except for the small red of the camp bonfire which rapidly diminished to a fly speck in size.

* * *

THE eastern sky grew gray and then pink. Skinner made his course directly south and climbed another thousand feet. Broad red streaks shot up over the curve of the earth and turned the clouds below the plane into dazzling patches of color and shadows rimmed with fleecy white.

Skinner shouted joyously at Wong and pointed to the clouds. Wong looked and nodded, grinning, but did not understand. He did not understand that Skinner had the nose of the ship pointed for the gay nights and lights of Shanghai, five hundred miles away.

Neither did he understand that the pile of little lumps which all but filled his cockpit constituted a small fortune in silver. He could not understand, as Skinner did, the tune which the motor was humming:

"Every cloud has a silver lining.
When your luck ain't good
Don't go complai-ning.
It makes it worse
For to grouse and curse.
Just look for the silver lining."

For Wong it was sufficient that he had his Gen'al, and that the Gen'al was happy.

TROPHIES OF TRAVEL—NOTES AND PICTURES

by Raymond S. Spears

OF ALL trophies collected by the far-wanderer, probably nothing is more precious in after years than a series of pocket notebooks in which, at odd and spare times he wrote down where he was, what he did, what he saw and what happened from day to day. Men and women keep these records, but many neglect them. I copied such a notebook, one time, down in eastern Tennessee. Two brothers, mixed up in a feud, shot two or three of the opposing family, and then took to the hills, scouting. One of the brothers kept count for more than a hundred three-by-five-inch pages of their going, how they sat on a mountain, watching a posse after them, how they saw a woman steal a neighbor's chicken, how they met friends and had a "tas'e" at a still.

This was a simple record, yet full of adventure, full of the between-the-lines that such written accounts must always have. Afterward, the brothers went to Indian Territory—Oklahoma, now—but the diarist mourned to me that he hadn't spent an occasional dime on a notebook, keeping track of the day-to-day wanderings. Those who keep no records—what things they lose from their memories!

My own notebook accounts of personal wanderings in woods, fields, on streams, lakes, bicycles, skiffs, motorboats, automobiles, shanty-boats, snowshoes and afoot weigh perhaps sixty pounds—representing patience and much labor. I see that my mind ran much to scenery, how things looked, and there are page after page on which I tried to tell how mountains, snowy woods, prairies, valleys, streams, cotton fields and such things loomed. Well, it was doubtless good practise for writing descriptions. But never in such detail and minutiæ again for me!

No! Take a camera, one of those little fellows, making a picture about the size of an "officially sealed" postage stamp—two by three inches, say—and in ten seconds one records, what an hour, two hours' writing would not preserve. But write happenings, as you paste in memory pictures.

Crooked Deals

A Complete Novelette

By Edward Speyer

Author of "The Hard Guys," "Hi Jack," etc.

THE noise and shouting from the men's tent offended the forest night. They had a bottle, Burgess knew, for he had seen Reynolds pass it to one of the men just before Reynolds and McCall started back from camp for the junction; but seven men could hardly get so drunk on one bottle of moonshine. They must be testing his mettle, or else they thought that they could ride him.

Well, he was tired, but he would have to show them. There was no time like now. He left his tent and saw the canvas of the men's shelter as a bright shape against the dark of the hill. Some one must have been watching, for the screaming rose to an obscene crescendo as he approached.

"Cut out that noise!" Burgess said sharply as he flung back the flap.

"Try and make us!" said some one.

"Have a drink!" said another, stepping out and waving the bottle.

He was a stout, offensive-looking man, but Burgess hesitated not an instant. It was a long, straight drive that started with his left foot and ended with his right fist; and it caught the man flush on the jaw. Heavy though he was, the man left his feet at the impact, crashing against the tent wall. The bottle flew from his hand. He was completely out.

"Give me that bottle," said Burgess.

Brant, the Indian, who had been lying quietly on a cot in the corner, picked it up and handed it to Burgess, who smashed it against the tentpole. For a moment he surveyed the men, now docile enough, sitting on their cots.

"Cut out this noise and go to bed," he ordered and turned back to his tent.

It was a queer job, Burgess thought as he sat down and lighted a cigaret. He had felt something phony about it from the moment he had stepped on the train at Chicago with McCall, and it had been getting queerer all the time. McCall, of course, was a great engineer, or at least everybody said that he was a great engineer; but why should he spend all of a long day's journey talking to a comparative stranger—his employee at that—about women? An old man like McCall!

Had it not been for McCall's reputation—he had heard of him from Alaska to Mexico—Burgess would have thought him merely a foolish old man, the older man's fifty-six years seeming antiquity to his own twenty-eight. Then this meeting with Reynolds at the junction where they had alighted to drive out to camp.

"Meet Billy Reynolds, our superintendent," McCall had said. "Billy, this is Dicky Burgess, who's taking Solard's job. Reynolds, you know, cheats the mossbacks for us," McCall explained.

Soured by the train ride, Burgess was in no mood to be called "Dicky" by a casual stranger, slapped on the back or offered a drink of moonshine. He acknowledged the introduction briefly and made a quick study of Reynolds.

"Crooked Deals," copyright, 1924, by Edward Speyer

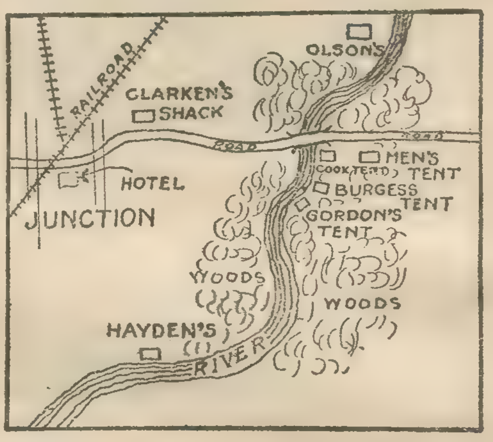
What he saw on the surface was not prepossessing—a big, gross man, too neatly dressed for the place, with an air of cheeriness that seemed to the younger man well worn, mechanical. Besides that, Burgess was making his own peculiar estimate and had decided that despite the perhaps thirty pounds advantage in weight and two inches of height which the other's six feet and more than two hundred pounds gave him, he could tear Reynolds to pieces in a fight.

Burgess always made this estimate. Physical peculiarities and the exigencies of his life had forced him into fight after fight, had made him a terrific fighter. He was cursed with a handsome head and long-lashed, violet eyes. An almost feminine grace of body had given him a deceptive appearance of slenderness. In a career that had begun as a pin boy in a mountain railroad camp, that had carried him along the outposts of civilization while he learned the profession of engineering by hard work and night study from arctic to tropics, these characteristics had not led to a peaceful life. Superior men had helped an intelligent and ambitious youngster; inferior ones had forced him to fight. The combination had made him; reserved, capable, aggressive and fearless.

In Seattle he had heard that McCall needed a resident engineer for a water-power job in Michigan. Attracted by the man's reputation and by a chance to see new country, he had wired and traveled half across the continent, and here he was. They had puffed from the junction in a steaming Ford over atrocious lumber roads and decaying bridges through a country slashed and desolate, burned over, with here and there wastrel farms and stands of hardwood amid the wilderness of gaunt stubs and jungle growth of poplar, cherry and blackberry. They had arrived in camp in time for the evening meal, and instantly Burgess was struck with the slack discipline of the place.

"Butch" was the cook, fat, absolutely bald, as a cook should be. In the broiling heat of the cook tent he wore, either as a badge of office with his dirty apron or as a tribute to his baldness, a derby hat. The men had shuffled in at his call, "Come a-runnin'!" leaving tools scattered about. Gordon, a tall, morose man with a three days' black growth on his face, was introduced as the level man; Comstock, a cheerful youngster, was Burgess' assistant.

There were eight hands who sat at the same table as the engineers, all lumberjacks or ex-lumberjacks left behind when the timber went, a nondescript lot. Burgess noted particularly only three, Nels Olson, a wiry little Swede, one-eyed, terribly scarred in some old-time battle; Brant, the Indian; and a dour, dirty man addressed by the others as Ben, the last largely because he sat silent amid the universal clamor over food.



The men straggled from the table one by one, a jest for Reynolds and even for McCall returned in kind. Nels left and trudged away to his farm near by, Comstock going with him.

"He's sparking Nels' girl," Reynolds explained. "He better be careful. Nels is a bad man—he's killed his man in his day."

He followed the man ruminatively with his eyes.

It was dusk when they left the tent. There was a spurt of conversation between Reynolds and McCall, of which Burgess caught only the words:

"Yes, a waitress. She'll get one for you."

Then he saw Reynolds slip the stout man the moonshine bottle, and the two departed in the Ford.

Burgess was surprized. He had expected McCall to stay, to give him instructions on the spot, but went to his tent saying nothing. There with due regard to the rights of Comstock, his tentmate, he put his effects in order. Gordon, the gloomy leveler who lived by himself in a small tent on the edge of camp, had retired without a word and though his light was burning Burgess preferred to make no advances but sat alone and studied the maps of the district till the tumult in the men's tent aroused him to action.

In the stillness that followed his raid he did not go back to the maps but pondered the peculiarities and personalities of his strange job. The hands did not worry him a whit. He had driven in the fact that he was boss. The work did not trouble him. A few words with Comstock would apprize him of how Solard had left it, and he could carry on the simple task of mapping the river bed and locating proper dam sites.

What did trouble him was the vague intimation of something wrong, the discipline too slack for a simple letdown of the few weeks of Solard's absence, the ambiguous superintendent and his flash of intimacy with the men in handing over the bottle. That seemed like deliberately incited mutiny. He wondered why Solard had left. Then too McCall's careless attitude astonished him.

HE WAITED up till nearly ten o'clock, when Comstock returned.

"You keep late hours," Burgess remarked.

The other flushed. He was not long out of college, a few years' Burgess' junior in age, centuries his junior in experience, a tall lad, still a little immature both mentally and physically.

"I went to see Ethel Olson," he said.

"Oh, that's all right," said Burgess, "but I wanted to ask you about the job. Here's the map. Show me where we are."

The boy readily drew up; and Burgess was pleased to find that his assistant had a good technical knowledge, quickly gave him the state of affairs. He said so, and Comstock reddened with pleasure.

"What's that blank space here?" Burgess asked, pointing.

"That's old man Hayden's land," the lad explained. "He had some trouble and won't let us on the ground. He ran Solard off with a gun."

"Trouble with who?"

"Reynolds, I guess," said Comstock. "Reynolds buys the land for the company, and I guess he and Hayden didn't hit it off. The old man lives there with his two sons, and Nels says they're a hard lot."

"We have to complete the map," said Burgess, studying it; "and of course we can triangulate enough points to give us a guide and more or less fake the rest, but I'd like to get on the land."

"Nels says not a chance. He knows him well."

"There's no use working ahead and leaving that big blank behind," said Burgess, and with that went to bed.

Butch's outcry in the dark hours before dawn awoke them, and a hasty toilet prepared them for a lantern-lighted breakfast. Only six men appeared from the men's tent, the man Burgess had struck staying behind. He asked for him.

"His jaw's broke, I guess," said Brant.

"Bring him here," Burgess ordered; and when the man appeared, sullen, with a swollen face, he made a swift examination. "Your jaw's all right," he said. "Don't try to soldier on me. You can either stay here and work or you can take your time now. Which will it be?"

The man looked at him evilly.

"I'll quit," he said.

"Look up his time and pay him after breakfast, Comstock," Burgess ordered.

The man ate painfully, took his money and left just as Olson appeared down the river, poling a flat-bottomed skiff. Burgess disposed of the men, two with Gordon to run levels, four with Comstock to clear lines in the brush, keeping Olson for himself. He walked down to the river bank as the Swede grounded his boat.

"You know Hayden?" he asked. The Swede nodded. "He won't shoot you if you go on his place? Well, go and ask him if he'll have a talk with me."

Olson, without replying, poled away into the swift stream. Burgess sat on the bank and possessed himself in patience. Something wrong, something radically wrong—but what? Maybe Hayden could supply the clew.

Suddenly he heard voices around the bend. A big, flat-bottomed boat poled by two men, a third sitting amidships, appeared. Behind was Olson's skiff. The big boat neared the beach, and from it a setter dog sprang ashore and rushed at Burgess so swiftly that before he had time to shift he was bowled over and the dog was licking his face. He pushed him off and arose laughing, the dog still leaping around him, in time to receive a mountain of a man being helped from the boat by two huge young men.

There were no smiles on their faces, the older man's being grim and set, those of the younger two noncommital. They wore worn overalls; their hair was unkempt, their faces bristled toward next Sunday's shave.

"You're Mr. Hayden," said Burgess, extending his hand.

It was refused.

"You wanted to talk to me," the big man said.

It was not a question.

"Yes," said Burgess, ignoring the refusal to shake hands. "You won't let us survey your lands, I'm told. Why not?"

"I don't want surveyors stickin' stakes all over my land," said Hayden. "There ain't no use in it anyhow. I'm not goin' to sell. I'd sooner buy."

"We're not sticking stakes in the land, and the use to me is that I'd like to complete the map, not have a gap in it. It doesn't commit you to selling. Likely we'll place the dams so that we won't flood your land anyway. Nothing's settled yet."

Hayden looked at him shrewdly. "Then what's Reynolds buying all this land around here for?"

"Is he?" asked Burgess.

His real surprize showed. Matters from an engineering point of view had hardly gone far enough for land-buying, though there was justification for the purchase of options.

Hayden said nothing, but Burgess was conscious of his intense survey. He caught and held the giant's dull blue eyes. The big sons withdrew to the water's edge to gossip with Olson, the dog alone was active, rubbing against Burgess' leg. At length Hayden spoke.

"You look like a square fellow," he said. "It ain't often my dog makes a mistake, either. You're a fighter, too." Here Burgess wondered by what wilderness telegraph he had heard the story of the last night's affair. "I'll talk to you."

He started ponderously toward Burgess' tent and seated himself on a groaning cot. Burgess followed and took the other cot, waiting for Hayden to open.

"You just come here," said the mossback; "an' maybe you don't know, but you're in with a crooked lot, young fellow."

"How so?"

"Well," said Hayden, "look around. Land here ain't worth much even when it's been farmed. When a man comes to another an' says will he take six dollars for land that ain't worth nothing and let him bill the company for eight—why, where's the two dollars goin'?"

Burgess answer was a long, low whistle.

"I ain't namin' names," Hayden went on "but who buys the grub and for how much? Who buys a company Ford to take Ben's wife that's a waitress at the junction around the country? Who buys moonshine for God knows who? I'm a square man, young fellow; I've worked hard all my life an' been square, an' I'm too old to change now."

"Thanks, Mr. Hayden," said Burgess. "I thought some things were odd."

The man lurched himself erect.

"That's how it stands, young fellow. You an' Nels an' this Brant can survey my land so long as you don't drive no stakes. I can trust you—but nobody else. And if there's trouble ——"

"Thanks again, Mr. Hayden," Burgess said, "but I do my own fighting—up to any limit."

"Kinda thought you did," said the big man with his first smile.

He held out his hand, shook with a mighty grip and rolled down to the river brink. In a few moments he was around the bend, and Burgess was about to set out in Olson's boat to join Comstock's crew when a hearty hail stopped him. It was Reynolds.

"Hey there, Dick," he shouted merrily. "Why ain't you working?"

Burgess turned back without replying, but Reynolds took no notice of his attitude, bellowing and billowing on.

"Left the flivver up at Olson's," he said, "and walked over. Right pretty girl, that Ethel of yours, Nels. Came to tell you McCall's gone back to Chicago and won't be back for two weeks. Telegram last night. Say, we had some party last night!" He winked ponderously.

His rush brought him down to the boat. Burgess waited for him to cease and then said:

"If you aren't doing anything right now, Reynolds, I'd like to talk with you. Olson, you can tell Comstock I'll hike down the river trail and meet him after lunch."

Reynolds was no whit abashed.

"Sure, I'd like to have a talk with you, Dick," he said and followed Burgess into the tent.

"What kind of sculduggery are you up to about this land-buying?" Burgess opened suddenly.

"Don't you believe everything you hear from disgruntled old mossbacks who haven't got their price," Reynolds smiled.

"You're buying, aren't you?"

"Sure; we need the land. We'll flood it, and flowage is cheap now."

"Do you know where the dams will be?"

Reynolds was cornered but not stopped. He changed his tactics suddenly.

"Listen, Dicky," he said; "we can get together on this."

Burgess hardened.

"Get together?" he said. "You can get out—right out. I'm writing McCall now—immediately."

The essential hardness of the superintendent broke through his affability.

"You young squirt—" he began, rising to his feet.

Burgess also rose and was balancing easily on the balls of his feet, his eyes wide open. Reynolds noted this and thought better. He whirled on his heels and stalked out of the tent, leaving Burgess to write his letter.

Of course he expected no immediate answer—at the most a wire telling him that McCall was on his way or had warned some official of the company. Meanwhile work proceeded in an orderly manner. Burgess flung himself into the task of mapping Hayden's land, a little hampered by the interest the old man displayed in the oddities of topographical survey, which he had not seen before. Hayden and his dog were always in evidence lumbering about; and the engineer, Brant and Olson were the guests of an elaborate meal graced by forbidden venison, cooked by one of the big sons.

DISCIPLINE was restored in camp. The men still ate with the engineers; but there was order and a decent quiet. Gordon, glum, forbidding, of a dyspeptic trend, kept his distance and was inactive except when at work but for one evening when he strode seven miles to the junction on some unstated venture. He returned late at night, drunk, but rose no gloomier than usual.

Comstock rather opened up. His affair with Olson's daughter evidently was a serious one, for him at least. He dilated on her beauty—she was of a Swedish fairness with a touch of fire from some other race—and it surprized Burgess that she was convent-educated. The boy was plainly impressed by her inappropriateness in the log farmhouse and seriously intended to translate her to other worlds.

Reynolds did not show in camp, though word passed from time to time of his activities at the junction. On Saturday Butch informed Burgess that a passing farmer had told him that Mrs. Reynolds had arrived at the junction and was putting up at the Junction House.

"She better look after her husband," Butch said, "or she won't have none. It's all right for him to be runnin' with Ben's wife—Ben growls an' hates him, but he ain't got no nerve and no more pride 'n to take a job from him. But last couple of afternoons he's been hangin' round Nels Olson's Ethel. Nothin' wrong, understand; but Nels, he's touchy, an' oh my ——, he's a killin' fighter!"

Burgess listened absently, touched with a faint curiosity as to what Mrs. Reynolds might be like. He would have been more than surprized to learn that he had been the cause of her coming and was even then the sole subject of conversation between husband and wife in the best room of the Junction House.

"You understand, Marge," Reynolds was saying, "this is for business reasons. I've got to hook him some way quick or he'll queer me."

"I don't just like this, Billy," said the girl. "It's all right drinking with men and smoking with them to get them in good humor—it helps you in your business, though it does get a bit tiresome after three years of it. But this seems going a bit far. And why should he fall for me anyway? I'm no vamp."

Reynolds laughed.

"You don't think enough of yourself," he said, "and besides I know these boys that are in the camps away from women. They'll fall for any girl that is nice to them."

She shook her head.

"I don't like it," she insisted.

"Just this once," Reynolds pleaded. "I know you've done a lot for me in the three years we've been married, and it's helped a lot. But this boy doesn't like me; he'll queer me with the mossbacks, he'll double-cross me and maybe queer me with McCall. I've got to get some comeback. This is a big deal."

"Oh, all right," she said, and Reynolds all but barked with joy.

Business must be queer stuff, Margaret Reynolds reflected. She had given it little thought in the brief years of her married life, smiling at men whom her husband deemed important, playing the gay hostess, rather bored after a while. When a girl is wedded at eighteen to a man much older than herself she is likely to accept his word as gospel.

Margaret put up with her husband's frequent absences, engaged in the odd tasks in which he employed her without understanding, writing everything down to her ignorance of business. Here she was at his call in a funny room in a funny hotel kept by a funny old woman.

Burgess had rather expected Reynolds to bring his wife to camp Sunday, it was so much the thing to do. From his tent he saw the car bump along the road that led from the main highway, saw Reynolds hand out what he described to himself as a slim little thing. Courteously he left his tent to greet the guest, finding her taller than she appeared against her husband's big bulk. Reynolds was his usual self.

"Meet the wife, Dick," he said. "Marge, this is Mr. Burgess. She wanted to see the camp, Dick, and I got business with old Sawyer down the road, so I'll just leave her on your hands for you to do the honors."

"Glad to be of service," said Burgess.

This was a bit crude, he thought. It was obvious that Mrs. Reynolds was to be used to approach him in the matter of at least an armistice, and under his long lashes he appraised her carefully.

She did not seem exactly the type; slender and active, a pleasant, honest face under a sport hat; a suspicion of bobbed hair. Generally she seemed more in place in her khaki suit and her laced boots than did Reynolds in his city clothes. Burgess did not know much about women; his frontier associations had not led him to many contacts; but he felt that it would be easier to trust than to distrust this specimen. Nevertheless he was on his guard.

"We haven't much to show you, Mrs. Reynolds," he said, "unless it is Butch's derby hat, but what we can do we will do."

Reynolds laughed immoderately.

"You're all right, Dick!" he roared.

His wife looked at him with a faintly puzzled expression.

"All I want," she said, "is to loaf around the woods."

"Well, I'll be going," said Reynolds, and his car snorted and bounced back to the road while Burgess, smiling, aloof and a little expectant, awaited the next move.

"Really," said the girl as she watched the car dissolve in a cloud of dust, "if there is a good trail along the river all I want to do is stroll along it till we find some pretty spot and then sit down and smoke and soak in the scenery."

"Pretty spots are rather rare in this part of the country," Burgess answered, "but there are some rather decent places in the hardwood along the ridge downstream. There's enough wind so that mosquitoes won't bother us there."

They set out along the path battered hard by the feet of rivermen, dipping and winding with the course of the stream. Brambles and tangled growth rose high on either side, making almost a tunnel, stifling hot. They marched perforce single file, a detriment to conversation, till finally the man turned and followed a sandy path up the hill. The cool breeze struck them suddenly as they emerged from the jungle to a high ridge of splendid forest maples that had escaped both ax and fire.

"Here we are," said Burgess. "The view—man's inhumanity to forests, desolation with a touch of the water of life in the river."

He waved his hand toward the spread of the river valley, visible here for miles, a close-knit carpet of struggling new growth pierced by the gaunt skeletons of bleached and fire-scarred trees.

"It's beautiful," said the girl, "but sad."

She dropped gracefully at the roots of a huge maple on the very edge of the ridge, throwing her gaze to the far edge of the valley where the smoke of Hayden's farmhouse touched the sky.

Burgess sat close at her side and offered her his cigarets; and for a few minutes they smoked in silence.

"I remember the woods," she said at length, "before they were cut—when I was a little girl. You're not from Michigan, are you?"

"I call Seattle my home," he said,

"but I've lived—anywhere. I've lived in forests—some forests where I think I was the first white man."

He told in a few words of forest adventure, of trails on lonely ridges the continent over.

"You've lived an interesting life, haven't you?" she observed. "My own—half a dozen words almost will tell it. Born in Traverse City. Lived alone with my mother—my father died when I was three—till she died. Married. *Finis.*"

"But married life?" he smiled.

"Business! Do this for business reasons. I'll be away three weeks on business. Invite the Joneses to dinner; he means a lot to me in a business way."

"Well, I suppose when a man is so wrapped up in getting on—" Burgess said tentatively.

"You don't like my husband, do you?" Mrs. Reynolds asked frankly.

Burgess was quite as frank.

"No," he answered.

"I don't know why you should try to queer him in a business way, though," she said. "It means nothing to you, does it?"

The rapidity with which Mrs. Reynolds had rushed to the attack surprized Burgess. He had expected something, but not so soon, though he would have been at loss to say just what he awaited. Pressed, he would have said vaguely, "vamp stuff," but here the thing had developed so rapidly and so naturally that he was unable to tell whether Mrs. Reynolds had steered it or whether it had just happened.

"I'm not trying to queer him," he said slowly. "To be honest with you, I am going to run him out of the company's employ."

"Why? Just because you don't like him or because you want his job?"

"Neither," said Burgess. "I suppose you know all the details?"

"I don't know any of the details."

"Then I hardly like to tell you them. But I will say this, Mrs. Reynolds. For what he has done and for what I am confident I can prove he has done he could go to jail. I am not trying to put him there."

The girl gasped and tried to turn the gasp into a laugh.

"I don't believe you," she said.

"Well, here it is," said Burgess, taking a sudden decision, and briefly sketched what he knew of Reynolds' operations. "Don't take my word that conspiring with the farmers to defraud the company of two dollars an acre is criminal. Ask any lawyer."

She held her peace, and it was Burgess who said:

"Don't let this bother you, Mrs. Reynolds. Possibly he can square things with the company, even make his peace. I don't intend to press things too far. We can have a good time today anyhow."

Since she was bound to endure his company till Reynolds' return he set himself to distract her, to entertain her, and presently they were on an easy footing. As they wandered back to camp to await Reynolds, Burgess was conscious that it had been a pleasant afternoon after all and eagerly accepted her invitation to come in and have dinner with her the next evening, Mrs. Reynolds agreeing to send out one of the livery Fords to carry him.

THINGS thus settled into an apparent armistice. Quite unexpectedly McCall's letter was extremely unsatisfactory, and it was evident that his close association with Reynolds would not make for easy going. He wrote that he had known Reynolds for quite some time, that the man had the best recommendations and had been satisfactory to the officers of the company. He felt that Burgess had been misinformed and asked that he do nothing rash till he, McCall, arrived on the scene, a matter of some two weeks.

This spurred Burgess to action; and, using Olson, who seemed somehow attached to him; Brant, the quiet Indian in whom he had great confidence; and old man Hayden's bitter enmity toward Reynolds he succeeded in getting further evidence. Notably there was a completed deal with one farmer who had sold for less than his neighbors and who deemed himself cheated.

Meanwhile the work went forward rapidly, Comstock being a capable subordinate and Gordon, though prone to wander into town to drink, fully up to his work. Twice in the junction Burgess saw Gordon drinking with Reynolds but thought nothing of it. Reynolds would drink with any one, and so, Burgess believed, would Gordon.

Despite the work Burgess found that he

saw a great deal of Mrs. Reynolds. He had accepted her invitation to dine and found thankfully that Reynolds was elsewhere. She was obviously interested in him; the subject of her husband's business affairs did not come up again, and she evinced what seemed to be a real pleasure in his society. Certainly she made him welcome and suggested new appointments. He found that he could hire a car and, time hanging heavy on his hands, bumped his way to town of an evening to avoid the dreariness of camp.

They spent the following Sunday together exploring new ground, lunched beside a little trout stream, and Burgess read more of her life than she ever expected, discovered her essential innocence, her pliability in her husband's hands. He felt his interest and even an affection growing and let them grow.

Reynolds was nowhere in evidence, occupied with his own employments. Burgess saw him, of course, alone, with Gordon, with strangers. Once he saw him in deep converse with the man whose jaw he had nearly broken on his first night in camp.

At another time, driving back to camp in the evening, he had met him in the company car with some woman. Hardly had they brushed by in the narrow road when Burgess all but ran down one of his own men, Ben, standing in the middle of the road looking after Reynolds' car.

"Jump in and ride," Burgess shouted, stopping.

Ben stood for a moment, sullen, and shook his fist after the retreating car.

"—— 'em!" he growled and clumsily climbed aboard.

So matters rolled along, awaiting the coming of McCall. There was an undernote of uneasiness in camp which Burgess fully understood was born of division—Reynolds' men and his men. Nevertheless he kept strict rule and got the work done. The superintendent did not attempt to dispute his authority; the men had no stomach for unbacked mutiny, especially since Burgess would be supported by the terrible Nels and the highly respected Brant.

Despite his apparent inattention Reynolds was well aware of all that went on in camp. Burgess even knew that he had been apprized of his additional evidence and was on his toes for some overt act before McCall arrived. Finally on a Wednesday morning a telegram arrrived advising that the engineer would be on hand the following Friday, bringing with him the president of the company.

Burgess looked for things to happen. They started almost immediately, more of them and more unexpected than anybody had a right to await.

If Reynolds had been able to maintain a singleness of purpose during the armistice weeks' events would have perhaps taken an entirely different trend. Learning of McCall's coming, he started with his wife early in the afternoon.

"Well, Marge," he said, "it's about time we put the work on young Burgess. He's fallen for you pretty hard."

"He won't work," she said. "I've tried."

"Well, I didn't expect him to," said Reynolds. "I didn't think you could talk him round. So we'll have to put the stuff on him."

"What do you mean?" she asked, puzzled.

"That's easy," he said. "You send a note around to him this evening telling him you're in trouble and want to see him. Then you put on a kimono and wait for him. When he gets here I'll find him here and he'll have to do what I want."

He smiled merrily at his wife. She leaned back in her chair and knitted her brows.

"I don't quite understand," she said. "You mean—you want him to think you think——"

"Yes, yes," said Reynolds eagerly. "Then we've got him; see?"

"Why, I could *never* do that," said the girl, rising slowly. "Why—why, what he said must be true! You must be doing something crooked."

Reynolds' face hardened.

"You must be falling for that pretty boy yourself," he said in what he meant for a sneering tone.

His wife ignored the taunt.

"I wouldn't play that game even to save you from prison," she said evenly.

"You won't?" he cried, losing his temper. "Well, you will!" shaking his finger at her threateningly.

"No," said the girl firmly. "After all I suppose you are little better than a crook."

Before either knew what was happening, Reynolds struck her—not hard for his strength, but enough to knock her down. The blow inflamed him. He kicked her. She screamed once; he drew back aghast, turned suddenly and left the room. Instantly the hotel and in a few minutes the whole junction was abuzz. Willing couriers spread the news abroad that Bill Reynolds had beat up his wife and streaked it away in his flivver.

The news reached the survey camp, gloriously embroidered, before the men returned from work. Burgess was afield with Comstock's crew, mapping a difficult bit of terrain. They took their leisurely way home past Olson's farm, where Comstock dropped out with Nels to see his *inamorata*. Burgess, marching ahead with Brant, got the full impact of the gossip Butch had received from a romancing farm lad.

"Yessir," the cook said, "he left her a bleedin' wreck. Kicked her and jumped on her an' knocked out all her teeth. What for, I dunno. Maybe she put up to him some of his goings-on."

Burgess turned pale, his fine lips hardening. There was no doubt in his mind as to what he wanted—he wanted Reynolds' blood. Tempering this was the idea that Margaret needed him, that she must have his help before he made a gory spectacle of her husband. Under stress he found that he cared greatly for the companion of the past weeks. She might be dead, dying.

Meanwhile the rest of the men had come up and were drinking in the tale. Into the group charged Comstock, hatless, breathless, disordered. It was some moments before Burgess could calm the boy's extreme agitation or get more from him than curses of Reynolds.

"That —— Reynolds— Ethel— The old lady— Pitchfork."

Presently it became fairly plain to Burgess that Reynolds had been at Olson's farm that afternoon, had offered Ethel some insults—these not clear—had been slapped by her and grappled with her. Pete, her younger brother, had hit him in the leg; Mrs. Olson had dashed out with a pitchfork, and Reynolds had been driven back ingloriously to his car. Nels on hearing the news had gone in quietly and was reported to be oiling his gun. Comstock was clamoring for his.

"You want a rattle," said Burgess quietly. "I'm going to the junction now and settle all this Reynolds business. You stay here and don't move out or I'll fix you."

"That's right," said Brant suddenly. "No kid business."

As the engineer walked over toward his car Butch came galloping from the cook-tent, clutching a fried egg hastily placed between two thick slices of buttered bread.

"Here, eat as you go," he shouted, handing it to Burgess. "It ain't good to do it on an empty stomach."

So Burgess roared up the highway as dusk fell, running into he knew not what. It was falling dark as he reached the junction, his car boiling, himself in the same condition. He left the flivver at the front of the hotel, not pausing to lock it, and stalked through the bleak lobby and up the stairs, paying no heed to any one. Unceremoniously he flung open the door of Margaret's room.

There was some woman there, but he did not notice her. He only saw Margaret in the bed by the glare of the electric light, and he went directly to her.

"Oh, Dicky," she said when she saw him. "He hit me! He kicked me! Oh, Dicky!"

"Are you all right, Margie? Are you badly hurt?"

He knelt by the side of the bed.

"No, Dicky; but he hit me! Because I wouldn't put over a dirty trick on you. He kicked me. I'm frightened. I'm so glad you're here!"

"That's all right, Margie," he said. "It's all right if you're all right. Because I'll take care of you."

They did not note that for the first time they were calling each other by their given names; they did not note that the woman departed nor heed the passage of time. It might have been but a few moments or it might have been an hour—it was in fact less than a quarter of an hour—when the door was flung open.

"I've caught you at it!" said Reynolds' voice, hard and triumphant.

After all, things were working for him. He held his big revolver so that Burgess, on his knees by the bed, turned and looked up directly into the barrel.

Margaret cried out once at the sound of the voice. Burgess, turning, saw the muzzle a bare four feet away; and things happened so quickly that Reynolds would have had no time to press the trigger even had he so desired. To turn, to leap, were, for the lightning-quick Burgess, but a single motion.

Before his sluggish brain could brush aside its triumph and act, Reynolds felt the pistol wrenched from his hand and a blow on the face. They were simultaneous. The blow was not very heavy; but it was instantly followed by three more, all hard ones, and a savage heel in the knee. Reynolds toppled. Before he could fall a long swing caught him in the face.

As he crashed to the floor something landed with fearful impact on his diaphragm. He recognized this vaguely as being Burgess' knees; but so many blows were landing on him that he had no time to assimilate this information. He felt blood running from his face, smelled blood, tasted blood.

Then dazedly he knew that it was over, that he had been flung out. A door slammed. Somebody was applying cold water to his face.

Burgess turned from the slammed door, hot, disheveled, but in no wise injured. He was breathing heavily from his terrific exertions; but Margaret saw that he was smiling with a somber joy.

"That, I think," he said, "finishes him. I guess he's through with this, too," he said, stooping and putting Reynolds' revolver in his pocket.

He smiled again at the girl, astonished, sitting up in bed.

"But he's so big!" was all that she could say.

"Fat, you mean. I've got more real active pounds than he has."

He laughed.

"But what will happen now?" she asked, wide-eyed.

Burgess seated himself on the edge of the bed and took her hand.

"I'll tell you what's going to happen right now," he said. "You're going to try to get some sleep. I'll send that woman in to give you anything you want. I'll go outside and see what Reynolds is doing; see that you aren't disturbed tonight."

It was some little time before he could calm her sufficiently so that he could leave; but at length he surrendered her to the charge of the woman, who seemed a decent sort, and ventured forth. They told him that Reynolds had left with Clarken.

"Who's Clarken?" he asked.

"You ought to know," said one of the men. "He's the guy you busted up at camp. I suppose they went to Clarken's shack, up the road a piece."

Without any particular caution Burgess walked out. He thought he knew the shack, a mean hut just beyond the bend. The night had fallen dark, and the foliage and brush made the road even darker than the open fields; but the engineer was used to such travel, knew the road and was confident that he would find the way.

Just as he reached the bend, where he could see a patch of lighter sky against the dark of the jungle on either side, he saw a flash and heard a crack and the unmistakable whine of a bullet. He seized Reynolds' gun and fired back—not once but three times, once at the flash, once on either side—and fell forward flat to await return fire.

To his astonishment he seemed to have awakened a perfect fusillade. There was no fire in front of him; but at his right and rear and at the right ahead of him, guns spoke. He heard a coughing, screaming groan and a heavy fall with a crash of brush, but dared not move, clinging closely to the earth. Then there was a light movement in the shrubbery, shouts down the road and the glaring lights of a car. He lay flat till the mob of men running and clinging to the auto came up to him. Then he rose.

"What's happened?"

"Who's shot?"

"Where is he?"

There was a perfect babel.

"Some one shot at me, and I shot back," said Burgess. "Then two more men started firing, and I lay low. I heard some one fall over there."

Lanterns and car lights illuminated the spot indicated. In the ditch lay a dark mass which two men roughly rolled over. Burgess, in the midst of the crowd, noted that most of the men were utter strangers to him, and that many were more or less drunk.

"Who is it?" some one called into the ditch.

"By ——, it's Reynolds!" exclaimed one of the men flashing his lantern. "Deader'n a dumbbell."

They crowded down, milling about the body, leaving Burgess standing on the edge. More men came pouring out of town and down the road, and he noted Olson and

Brant in the crowd. Voices kept calling news and queries.

"Shot twice in the chest."

"Who done it?"

"Lift him out, boys."

"Get the car."

Suddenly Burgess was aware of menacing faces.

"There's the man that done it!" some one cried.

"Get a rope!"

Brant's hand was on Burgess' shoulder. "Come away," he urged.

"I didn't shoot him," said Burgess. "At least if I did he shot first."

"They've got a rope now!" said Brant. "Quick! It'll be too late."

He dragged at Burgess' arm. The engineer saw that the crowd, mostly drinking companions of Reynolds, was in no mood to hear reason. He turned with the Indian and ran. Somebody fired at them as they left the road; then they were lost in darkness, Burgess following the Indian's dimly seen form over some kind of soft trail. Presently Brant called back softly to stop. They could hear no pursuit.

"They'll go to camp to look for you," Brant explained. "We'll go to Hayden's by the old trail."

SWIFTLY striding through the night, following his guide blindly, Burgess had leisure to review the events of the day. He had little fear of eventual danger once the suddenly formed mob worked off its ire. Immediate shelter, even a camp in the woods, was all that was needed. Anyhow Margaret was safe.

The shooting along the road was confusing. Certainly some one had fired at him. Was it Reynolds? He was not sure, though to the best of his recollection the shots fired at him had come from some little distance from the spot where Reynolds' body had been found. But who had fired from his right he could not tell, though he suspected that it might have been Olson, whom he had last heard of oiling his gun for vengeance. But two men had fired.

The barking of Hayden's dogs interrupted his reverie. They raced raging around the home enclosure till they caught either the voice or scent of Brant, which quieted them somewhat. The noise brought old man Hayden to the window, nightshirted, armed with a rifle.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"Burgess and Brant," the engineer replied. "I'm in trouble. Can I come in?"

"You betcha," came the answer with the slamming of the window.

There were noises inside, and the door was opened to them. Once inside and seated, Burgess explained hastily.

"Well, it wasn't me that shot him, more's the pity," grunted the old man; "but it's all right. I'll keep you here till this lynchin' idea is over—even if they find where you are."

"I don't know whether I shot him or not," said Burgess. "If he was the man that fired at me perhaps I did. I took three shots with Reynolds' own .38. Do you think I shot him?" he asked Brant.

"I don't know," said the Indian; "but I'm going to find out who did."

With that he prepared to leave; and at Hayden's invitation Burgess undressed and composed himself on the couch. In spite of the excitement of the day his weariness and fine physical condition brought him immediately to the brink of sleep. Dozing, he heard the Indian push one of Hayden's little boats from the rough beach and set off up the river.

Brant had taken the boat without permission and pursuant of his ideas did not go directly to camp but landed a little way downstream, fetched a quiet circle around the camp and approached from the road. He found the place lit up, awake and agitated. Butch, the cook, his derby hat at a perilous slant, held forth the minute he saw him.

"My ——, where you been!" he cried. "First Ben comes tearin' up the road yellin' that a million mobbers is comin' in Fords lookin' for the boss; then he dives away and hides out in the brush. Me, I ain't scairt of no mobbers. Then they come here lookin' for him, yellin' as how he shot Reynolds to death.

" 'Good riddance,' says I; 'but I don't think he done it, gents. 'Cause why? 'Cause he left his gun here.' I seen it hangin' in his tent. Then they roars around a while an' goes on somewhere."

"Where's Ben?" asked Brant.

"He ain't come back yet."

"Where's the young fellow?"

"He's been over to see his gal; ain't back yet."

Now it was long past midnight—late hours for country wooing—and Brant was pondering this fact and its possible connection with the shooting when interruption came in the person of Olson, vigorously and profanely inquiring for Comstock. He reverted in his excitement to his original Scandinavian tongue, and it was some moments before they could make out that Comstock and Ethel had gone driving in Nels' ramshackle buggy and had not returned.

The uproar brought Gordon from his tent, whither he had retired after the departure of the mob. He was more than usually gloomy, but surprized every one with a bit of sound sense.

"They've probably gone to Lake City to get married in the morning," he growled. "They're old enough to do it and not old enough to know better."

With that he cursed everybody and went back to bed.

Nels somehow was mollified.

"If they get married," Butch remarked, "why everything's jake. If not, Nels, you c'n take care of that."

Gradually the camp cleared. Nels departed on the road to Lake City. Brant slipped quietly out of camp, while the others prepared for what sleep they could get before dawn.

The Indian marched swiftly to the scene of the killing. He meant that dawn should find him there, and it was a little before dawn that he passed Clarken's shack. He took up the work he had marked out as soon as there was light to see, unwearied by lack of sleep and a hard night's travel.

Two points were familiar to him—the spot in the road where Burgess had dropped and the ditch where Reynolds' body had been found. He noted them carefully; noted the bent brush where Reynolds' body had crashed down the bank into the ditch. He climbed to the top and found the end of the track, deep-indented marks of smooth-soled city man's shoes behind a big maple.

He looked around. Brant could not write; he could read only the shortest of words, and those slowly and painfully; but he could read the signs of the forest plainly, and a glance showed him that Burgess had spoken the truth. Bullets had come at Reynolds from two directions; they had slashed branches, bored into boles. He dug into their resting places with a knife and uncovered two. One, from up the road, was a steel jacketed .38, built for an automatic pistol; one from down the road an old-fashioned lead .44. There were no bullet marks from the direction of the spot where Burgess had stood.

Brant smiled and walked along the edge of the ditch. He found the course of three bullets; he found an ejected shell; then he found footprints, faint but clear. They were of shoepacks, but one of them was cracked across. This made him smile again.

The Indian crossed the road confidently and found immediately what he was looking for—the marks of rivermen's calked boots in the soft soil. One pair was unusually small, and he did not stop here. The other pair were larger, about normal size. Here Brant searched and found, as he expected, spent shells of a .38-caliber automatic.

Brant had never heard of Sherlock Holmes or any other detectives of fiction; but he knew all the woods had to tell of Reynolds' death. He had lived among the actors, had noted minute things that escaped the observation of most, his mind, occupied with small things only, remembering these trifles. He set out for the junction needing only one more fact to tell him who killed Reynolds.

The junction was already astir as Brant made for the hotel. The first person to greet him was the sheriff, who had dashed down from the county seat to be on hand. This worthy hailed him with:

"Hey, Brant? Where's this Burgess fellow?"

"Got a warrant for him?" asked the Indian.

"Naw! What do I want a warrant for? He killed Billy, didn't he?"

"Did he?" asked Brant and passed on inside, noting from the porch Burgess' abandoned car, shoved out of the roadway.

The loungers were on hand in force. Brant, mingling with them, learned that Reynolds' body was in a room in the hotel, that Doc Green from Lake City was performing what was variously called an "autotopsy" and a "postmortjum." He also got highly colored details of the battle in the hotel the night before.

"Seems to me," said one of the loafers, "that Burgess didn't need to *shoot* Billy if he wanted to kill him. All he needed to do was give him one more kick."

The doctor appeared on the stairs.

"It's a .38, boys."

They crowded around him to see the

bullet, not with the mere morbidity of city crowds, but with real interest. These men knew firearms; and as the coroner genially passed the bullet among them there was no discussion. One and all recognized the thing as the steel-jacketed projectile of an automatic pistol. Brant knew what he wanted. He knew who killed Reynolds.

There was a running about and a flurry of messengers. Then the sheriff shouldered his way up to the stairs, it being noised about that Mrs. Reynolds was up and that he would question her. On his way he spied the Indian.

"Hey, Brant! he shouted. "Come along. I want to question you, too."

The man hesitated, then followed, and they entered Mrs. Reynolds' room. She was sitting in a chair fully dressed, one eye discolored by her husband's blow. With her was the woman who had cared for her the night before. The sheriff lost his bluster.

"I hate to intrude, ma'am," he said, removing his hat, "but your late husband and Mr. Burgess had a fight up here last night. I gotta know about it."

Briefly she told him in outline the events of the night before. It sorely puzzled him.

"Did Burgess have a gun?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "He picked up Billy's revolver."

"What kind was it?"

She shook her head.

"It was a .38 Colt revolver," Brant volunteered. "Seen it lots of times."

"He wa'n't killed with a revolver," said the sheriff.

Nobody made any remark, and he turned on Brant.

"Where's Burgess now?"

"I don't know," the Indian lied.

"You seen him last night?"

"Sure, and so did about fifty others."

"Why ain't you in camp?"

"I come for his car," Brant replied.

That seemed to satisfy the sheriff. He had no reason to believe that Brant knew where Burgess was other than that they had run away from the scene of the shooting together. He could think of nothing to ask and made his clumsy adieus. Brant was going with him when Margaret called him.

"Oh, Mr. Brant," she said.

The unfamiliar prefix caused the Indian to smile as he turned his back to the sheriff, closing the door without a word on that officer's back.

"Did Mr. Burgess kill Mr. Reynolds?" she asked.

The Indian hesitated and shifted his eyes toward the woman. Margaret caught the glance.

"If you will leave us alone, Mrs. Dean?" she said and in a moment they were alone.

Brant glanced around and came close.

"No," he said in a low voice, "an' I know who did. I'm goin' to get him."

"Is Mr. Burgess safe?"

Brant smiled again. He was enjoying himself.

"Unless they take about forty men to get him."

"Will you tell me where he is?" she asked.

The man looked at her sharply.

"You want to see him?"

She nodded.

"Don't go," he warned. "If you want to see him I'll take you there after I've found the man."

"If you see Mr. Burgess," she said, making no objection, "tell him that I have all faith in him."

Brant nodded, noting a tear in her eye, and made a hasty departure. He did not like women's tears; and besides he had work to do. He pressed through the throng where the sheriff was holding a roaring inquisition, climbed into Burgess' car and bumped his way back to camp.

MOST of the men were still hanging around without work. Gordon had taken two of them and followed the program of the day, but without Burgess or Comstock the others were footloose. Brant missed Ben and asked for him, was told that he had not returned to camp.

Butch, in return for the gossip of the junction, gave him food and packed him a lunch—a big lunch, Brant specified; and the cook suspected that Brant took to the woods with him supplies for Burgess, hiding out in the brush.

Burgess, however, was in no need of food. His host fed him bounteously; but as the morning wore on the engineer began to feel that the confinement on which Hayden insisted was almost as irksome as jail might be. He was permitted the freedom of the back porch, nothing more, the old man even posting one of his sons in the front yard where a good lookout could be kept.

"Don't want to be arrested, do yeh, young fellow?" Hayden said. "Sheriff's probably looking for yeh, an' while he's a Democrat, which ain't right in a Republican county, he ain't such a —— fool as he looks. He don't *know* y're here, but he'll look here because y're my friend."

"What will you do if he comes?" Burgess asked.

"Tell him to go to ——," said Hayden, his old eyes gleaming.

Litigation and warfare were the breath of his nostrils, and he knew to the inch how far the sheriff dared go.

So Burgess held himself in peace during the endless morning with nothing to read, nothing to do but wonder and ponder, largely as what Margaret was doing, what she thought of him, what was going to happen. He felt peculiarly tender and protective toward her; she filled his thoughts finally to the exclusion of the sheriff, Reynolds, McCall, everything.

Toward noon events brought him more to think of. The herald was old man Hayden with the simple words called through the door:

"Sheriff's comin'. Inside!"

From the inner room, parlor, living room, what not, Burgess heard the colloquy by the gate.

"You got young Burgess here. I wanta arrest him!"

"What d'ye want to arrest Burgess for?" Hayden's voice.

"For killing Billy Reynolds."

"Sho! Is Bill Reynolds killed? That's fine!"

Evidently the sheriff was getting out of the car; for Hayden's next words were:

"Never mind gettin' out. You won't find him here."

"Ain't he here?" asked the sheriff.

"I said you won't find him here."

There was a quick silence, and Burgess sensed it as the curious unvoiced threat of arms. Then the sheriff's voice:

"Listen here, Hayden, this won't do you no good."

"Well, it won't do me no harm either."

"I'll get a warrant an' come down here."

"With a warrant you're welcome."

Then Burgess heard the roar of the motor and heard Hayden stepping back on the porch, muttering about "them Democrats" and chuckling to himself. One of the sons came in and began busying himself over the noonday meal, laughing, singing a little. The household was soberly joyous over the victory.

The afternoon wore on. Burgess' throat was raw with smoking Hayden's vile tobacco, his own being long exhausted, when the four o'clock silence was again shattered by the noise of a motor.

"Brant an' a lady with a shiner," one of the sons reported; and Burgess, though he knew who the lady was, restrained his impatience and held his place on the back porch. There was a conference, overlaid by the barking of dogs, and then Hayden's voice called cheerily:

"It's all right. Come on out, young fellow."

Burgess emerged into the sunlit open to see Margaret shyly advancing.

"It's all right," she said. "Mr. Brant caught Ben, and he confessed."

There was a babble of explanations, and Brant finally said:

"As soon as I looked the place over an' found out a .32-caliber automatic killed him, I knew who done it. Little feet and .44, big feet an' .38. Nels's got little feet an' a big gun; Ben's got big feet an' a little gun. It happened this way."

Slowly and with difficulty he unraveled for Burgess the events of the night, skipping his train of reasoning only to be brought back to it. Ben, his dull anger against Reynolds fanned by the general condemnation of the man, had left camp immediately after Burgess and had been outside the hotel when Reynolds and Clarken left. Anxious for revenge, he followed; but the two kept close together; and he had no opportunity.

He had hidden in the brush, seen them go to Clarken's shack and come out together. Clarken had gone a bit farther down the road; but Ben, though he could detect Reynolds' bigger bulk in the darkness, could not see him clearly enough to shoot till the man had changed his position, when Clarken fired at Burgess, whom Ben could see coming up the road.

This much Brant knew surely from the babble of frightened Ben whom he had found in a shack on Milk Creek. The rest was partly conjecture, partly a message left by the tracks in the woods.

"I figure Nels comes r'arin' down, mad

about Ethel, just about when Reynolds and Clarken goes into the shack," he said. "He hides out too, but nearer the shack; and when they come out he's in the same fix as Ben—can't be sure of his shot till Reynolds moves. Then he can't see him as well as Ben, but he shoots anyhow—an' misses. They see you shootin'; they come out too because with all that firin' they don't know who done the killin'. Nobody knows till I see the tracks an' the bullet marks an' find out which one hit."

Burgess was satisfied.

"But what about Clarken?" he asked.

"Oh he's took his turkey an' beat it," said Brant. "I suppose Reynolds hiped him up to lay for you goin' home, but he ain't got any nerve of himself. Nels seen him at Lake City after the wedding."

"Wedding?" said Burgess. "In Heaven's name, what wedding?"

"Why, Ethel Olson and Comstock," Margaret broke in. "They eloped. Isn't it just too lovely?"

"Yes," said Burgess, looking at her with a smile; "weddings are lovely."

For some reason, Margaret blushed all the way up to the blue bruise that Reynolds' fist had left on her face.

STANDIN' BY

by Harold Willard Gleason

I'VE spent the most of my blue-sea days
Standin' by,
In many lands and in different ways
Standin' by:
Standin' by mates with a hazin' First,
Standin' by castaways mad with thirst;
I've been cheered an' beaten an' blessed an' cursed
Jus' standin' by!

Knifed in a row in a Malay port,
Standin' by;
Jailed for naught, in a Chinese court,
Standin' by;
Raised to bosun and broke by dark;
Voted a purse by a Fruit Line ark,
An' pinched by a bobby in Twick'n'am Park,
Jus' standin' by!

Nearly was drownded—went down twice—
Standin' by.
A sealer stove in by arctic ice,
Standin' by;
Kissed by a countess, spite of my beard,
Didn't do much, but she got skeered,
Captained a gun-crew—and got cashiered,
Jus' standin' by!

Some day I figger my cruise will end
Standin' by;
Somehow I've liked to rate as a friend
Standin' by;
An' somehow I think when I'm warped in,
Though I'm a sailor—an' sailors sin—
There's no Brig Eternal for one who has been
Jus' standin' by!

The Altar of the Legion

A Three-Part Story
Part II

By Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Authors of "Murkwood Spears," "The Hand of the Mahdi," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

TO LEGIONIS ASA, last outpost of the Roman Britons, fled Prince Meriaduc, son of King Owain of North Wales, and Niall of the Sword for aid against the Saxon hordes. For diplomatic reasons Meriaduc was impersonating his sister, the Princess Gwenlian, who lay ill at Aquæ Sulis.

On the southern coast of Damnonia they were attacked by a landing-party of Saxons, and were saved from massacre only by the intervention of Drusus, Prefect of the Damnonian March, and his legion.

During the ride to Bellerium, principal city of Legionis Asa, Drusus agreed to get the aid Meriaduc sought.

But the next day Niall insulted Nicator and Ventidius, who held the reins of government in Bellerium and who hated Drusus for his popularity. In revenge for the insult they turned the vote of the Senate away from sending legions against the Saxons.

In consternation Drusus arose in the Senate.

"Fathers of the People," he shouted, "I bow to the decree of the Senate. I now ask only permission to go with my command to serve under Owain's banner."

But this permission was withheld until the next meeting of the Senate four days hence.

In the mean time Tullia Marciana, ward of Drusus's Aunt Sophonisba, who was in love with Drusus and jealous of the supposed Princess Gwenlian, went secretly to Ventidius and Nicator, and prevailed upon them to call a meeting of the Council of Three. The council gave permission for Drusus to go against the Saxons, but with only a hundred men.

Fearing for the loss of his trade in tin with Aquæ Sulis, were that city to fall a victim to the Saxons, Carbo stirred up the populace against Ventidius.

Next morning Drusus, leading his hundred men out of the city, halted at the shouts of angry voices.

"Hark! What is that?" cried Niall.

Then they made out the words, roared by the mob of laborers:

"Ventidius! A rope for Ventidius!"

MORE than two thousand men and women, armed with cleaning knives, clubs and paving-stones, were marching steadily westward toward the house of Ventidius. They marched, shouting curses upon the politician, shrieking vile epithets, uttering piercing cries of anger and blood lust. A burly, bearded fisherman, with lungs of brass, bellowed so loud that his words cut through the turmoil as a trumpet blast rings through din of steel:

"Death to Ventidius! Tear the traitor limb from limb!"

Instantly the crowd took it up, chanted it, howled it in cadenced rhythm:

"Death to Ventidius! Death to Ventidius! Tear him! Tear him! Death to Ventidius!"

Finding the street tight-packed from curb to curb, Drusus and Niall leaped their horses on to the raised, narrow sidewalk. Shouldering the ragged edges of the mob, they were galloping to head it off, when, its emotion changed to joy, the mob began to shout:

"Drusus! Drusus!"

The long, packed column hesitated, swayed, halted. Coming up with the front rank, Drusus rode out before them, reined in, wheeled and stood facing them like an equestrian statue. He said no word, but sat his horse and calmly scanned their excited faces. Niall, beside him, had drawn his sword, but the prefect made no move.

For a moment the crowd stared back, then with one voice they cried:

"Drusus! Hail, Drusus! The people's friend! Long live Drusus!"

Then profound silence settled on them, as they waited for Drusus to give some token of leadership. Their eyes rested, as if facinated, on his strong, easy figure, watched his stern young face.

"What do ye here?" he asked at length.

A fisherman in front rank waved his knife, still clotted with cod guts.

"We go to kill Ventidius," he answered boldly. "Wilt thou lead us?"

"What will it profit you to kill Ventidius?"

"Ventidius enslaves us! He owns the docks, ruins us with wharfage charges!"

"Ventidius buys our fish and pays too little!" Then, as one grew bolder:

"Ventidius plots against you, Drusus! He forbids you to take the field against the Saxons!"

"All this I know," Drusus answered. "For years Ventidius has made you pay heavy tolls and given you too little for your fish. But there are those here who are not fisherfolk. Why would they kill Ventidius? For my sake?"

"We would all slay him for thy sake, Drusus!"

Drusus drew his sword and held it, gleaming in the morning sun, for all to see.

"Do ye dream," he asked, "that I fear to kill my own enemies? Think ye that this sword is too dull, this arm too weak to avenge my own wrongs on my enemies?"

"No, no!" the crowd roared. "Lead us, Drusus!"

"If I sought vengence on Ventidius, I could drive this blade through his breast with none to aid me. But I have no wish to kill Ventidius. Why, then, should ye draw steel against him for my sake?"

A young seaman answered:

"Ventidius is the enemy of the people! He prevents us from marching against the Saxons!"

"How know you that?" Drusus demanded.

"Every one knows it. He has sold our sister cities to the heathen."

"If you know that, you know more than I do. Know you not that Nicator, his dog, urged the Senate to send troops? I myself set out today with a hundred horsemen to join the North Welsh."

"A hundred men!" the sailor jeered. The crowd laughed.

"It is enough to preserve our honor," Drusus answered. "If that is enough for me, a soldier, let it suffice you."

"That is ill said, Drusus," an old man challenged. "You and your hundred are sent out to get rid of Drusus Marcianus. You have stood between us and the heathen like a wall. If you die, what will become of us?"

"Nevertheless, let Ventidius be. If ye kill him now, the law will have your heads or send ye to the quarries. What will your women do then, and your fatherless children? If ye would serve me, conduct yourselves like good citizens, and—watch Ventidius for me while I am gone.

"You are the people of Bellerium; upon you rests the liberty and the honor of the nation. If you stand guard over your liberties, neither Ventidius nor any other can destroy them. Watch Ventidius, but harm him not. If he at any time crosses the line between knavery and treachery, accuse him in the courts, and when I return I will see him punished. Ye call me your friend. Will ye do this for me?"

"We will! We will!"

"Then come with me now, as far as the city gate. I could have no better guard of honor in my departure than the plain citizens of Legionis Asa!"

The crowd burst into cheers and swung into procession behind him and Niall. Around the corner of the great building housing the baths they poured, while

Drusus rode into the forum like a conqueror.

But trouble lay in wait for them. As they debouched into the open forum, a company of police in close formation bore down upon them from the basilica, swords drawn. Reining in between the citizens and the police, Drusus addressed the latter:

"There is no need of further disturbance. These citizens go with me to the gate, there to disperse and return peacefully to their homes. I am responsible for their good behavior."

The centurion commanding the police saluted and answered:

"Are you responsible for the damage they have already done? Seven good policemen and a decurion are sorely hurt, beaten with their own staves in the performance of their duty."

"More will be hurt," Drusus answered, "if you lay hands on them now."

Wild yells and the tramp of yet other oncoming feet interrupted him. From the northeast corner of the forum, through the great arch of the city gate, rough figures rushed forth, brandishing picks and hammers.

"One and all for Britain!" yelled a hundred voices, and behind the savage leaders, scores upon scores of shaggy miners surged into the square.

Their naked torsos covered only with flapping, half-open mantles, their legs clothed in clumsy trousers and high, coarse brogans, the men of the tin mines charged down upon the police. Their long, matted hair flapped about their shoulders as they ran; they bore ugly single-prong picks, stone hammers, and iron mauls.

Swiftly Drusus spurred in between to the wild delight of the miners.

"Drusus! Drusus!" they yelled. "Drusus for Britain!"

At an order from the centurion of police, half his force faced about to meet the second mob. Their sharp swords caught the sunlight as they wheeled.

At the glint of steel the miners fell silent, and Drusus addressed them, urging them to return to their work without violence. But their leader, a thick-set Cornishman from Hither Damnonia, came forward and laid his hand on the prefect's bridle.

"Men of Legionis!" he roared, "how long will ye endure the tryanny of a brutal police hired by rich oppressors? How long will ye bow the neck to a bought Senate, which wrongs its bravest soldiers, and betrays good Britons to the heathen? I am no Roman, but a Celt of the Tin, and I will obey no longer! I am for Drusus! Drusus for Dictator!"

The fishermen and townsfolk took up the cry with glad shouts:

"Drusus for Dictator! Down with the Senate! Lead us against the Saxons, Drusus!"

A woman darted forward, half hysterical.

"Drusus for Dictator?" she screamed. "I say no! Drusus for king! Rule over us, Drusus! Slay the cowardly senators, slay Ventidius! Drusus, King!"

In vain Drusus shouted his protestations. They would not be quieted, would hear nothing but his assent to their plea. The centurion of police spoke a sharp command. His company divided, half marching toward the miners, half bearing down on the townsfolk. In a moment the battle would have been on.

Through the trampling and the shouting blared the hoarse blast of a military trumpet. Across the wide bridge which crossed the estuary not far from the corner of the forum, a column of steel-clad men was coming at the double. Square shields raised, short swords drawn, helmets flashing in the sun, a full maniple of infantry swept like a charging wall into the square.

Farmers they were, veterans of past wars. All citizens of Legionis Asa, who had served the state as soldiers, were allowed to retain their arms and accoutrements. Their commander, a sunburned, stalwart man in centurion's armor, ran with the speed of a deer into the middle of the forum, and threw himself between the advancing police and defiant miners.

"Hold!" he cried. "Back, ye dogs of police, or we tear you in pieces!"

Halting his men, the infuriated officer of police glared at the newcomer, recognized him, and demanded:

"What does this mean, Agrestis? Are you mad?"

"If you or your hirelings lay a finger on any man of Legionis, there will be a revolution!" the infantry officer retorted. "These lads behind me are but the first maniple of a full legion that marches down the river, and will be here before you can whistle thrice. We have enough men to bury all the police in Bellerium."

"But what ails you farmers? What is your complaint?" the policeman asked surlily.

"We complain that Drusus is wronged, that Ventidius hinders Legionis Asa from allying with Owain of North Wales!"

Miners and citizens burst into a prolonged cheer. Again the shout arose:

"Drusus! Drusus for King!"

But at this the embattled farmer, turning to Drusus, asked:

"Is this true? Would you be king?"

"Not I!" the prefect answered. "I wish nothing but peace in Bellerium. Already these men would have gone home quietly had not the police threatened them, and the miners defied the police. Hear me, men of Legionis! I ride forth as fast as I may to do battle with the Saxons. I will not be king, nor will I in any way disturb the peace of our land. Be off to your homes, if ye love me, and dismiss this folly from your minds!"

"Well said," the farmer answered. "Bellerium wants no kings, for all that a few fools may say. Hear me, Hortator! I will hold my men here till you draw off your dogs, and will see to it that the people disperse.

"But if we farmers hear of any arrests for this, we march on the city—mind that well! We are all old soldiers, and not a man of us but still possesses the weapons and armor he paid for when he entered the service. Is it a bargain?"

"So far as I am concerned," the officer of police answered. "But what if Nicator orders us to make arrests?"

Agrestis pointed to a great scar below the rim of his helmet.

"I got this," he said proudly, "serving in Damnonia under Drusus the Elder. We discharged soldiers are all for Drusus the Younger. He tells us he would be off at once to fight the Saxons. Would we were going with him! But the Senate will not have it so, and we obey the law as far as we may.

"Nevertheless, do you tell Nicator that the first arrest made for this days's work will bring a legion of old soldiers from the farms into the city, to storm the Senate-house, take Bellerium, and hold it in Drusus's name. Ye may have peace if ye want it; but by the saints, if ye want war, ye shall learn that Legionis still has legions! Hail, Drusus! and farewell!"

"Farewell, good soldier!" answered Drusus. "I leave Bellerium in worthy hands. Would I might take you with me; but I have work to do, and you are needed here. Now let every man who loves me seek his home!"

Under the watchful eye of Agrestis, the citizens began to disperse. With a final shout of defiance, the miners poured back down the road toward Stannatio. Behind them rode Drusus and Niall, on their way to Castellum Maris.

As the crowd made way for them, they guided their horses through, till they passed the foremost man. He, however, with a wild shout, seized the tail of the prefect's charger, and ran swiftly along behind. It was the burly Damnonian who had spoken for his people.

"You can not leave me, Drusus!" he bellowed. "I am a Cornishman, I! One and all for Britain! You can spare me a horse at the castle. If not, then this!"

A spring and he was mounted behind the prefect.

"Heigh!" he shouted. "I am off to fight the Saxons! A curse on all heathen, and a double curse on Ventidius!"

LIKE statues of steel, the four squadrons of the Fifth Ala sat their mounts on the parade-ground without the walls of Castellum Maris. Their close-fitting scale armor flung back the sun dazzlingly; their eyes were fixed on their prefect, standing between Tiburcus, second in command, and Johannes Hastator, legate of the infantry legion.

"One hundred troopers," Drusus repeated. "I can take no legionaries. It is understood that those who go may never see their homes again. Our way lies through leagues of perilous country, close to the Saxon borders; and if we pass safely, it is only to follow the standard of a king who will lead us into danger upon danger. Those who volunteer will advance a spear-length."

As one man, the four squadrons spurred forward, reined in, and dressed up on the new line. All had volunteered.

Drusus bowed his head, and when he looked up, his face was shining and his eyes were wet.

"If I could take you all," he said, in a voice that betrayed his emotion, "we would sweep the Saxons into the German

Sea! Tiburcus, choose five and twenty men from each squadron, and report to me at my quarters."

"Prefect!" cried Hastator. "Not half a maniple? Not even a single *ordo*? My men will follow you to the death!"

"If I could, I would take you all; but I am not empowered to select a single legionary. Remember, Hastator, you hold our second line! Let none say that the legions of Bellerium failed in their duty!"

Hastator saluted, and turned away. His eyes, too, were wet.

AT SUNSET, Drusus with his hundred lances and Niall with his twenty sabers rode down the steep ramp to the sands. In the distance they could see the steep road winding up the Damnonian cliffs, to run along the shore for miles, till it turned inland through the Cornish hills. On the sands Drusus halted and addressed his men:

"Remember, we may be riding to death. It is not yet too late—any who fear may still turn back!"

A front-rank trooper answered with the old cry of the gladiators:

"Hail Cæsar! *Mortituri salutamus!* We, who are about to die, salute you!"

"And I," the prefect answered, "salute you, soldiers of Britain! Forward!"

CHAPTER VII

AMBUSH

CUPPED in a hollow of the Cornish hills, small fires winked redly to one another in the moonless dark. The light of dying coals glimmered on stacks of lances. Horse nickered to horse through the gloom.

"Still awake, Niall?"

"I can not sleep in strange country. And I keep thinking I hear stealthy footsteps about us. Do your men keep good watch, Drusus?"

"I have just made the rounds myself," the prefect answered. "Ha! Where is Trehern?"

"The miner? I know not. Gone, is he? Well, this is his country; he has doubtless given us the slip. Are you sure of these Cornishmen? I would not trust a people who prefer their ease to risking their skins against the common enemy."

A hand reached out from the dark behind him, and gripped the Irishman by the shoulder. Niall was on his feet in one catlike spring. Before him the miner, Trehern, loomed in the dying firelight.

"Slander not a better people than your own, Raven," the Cornishman warned. "When we first set eyes on Saxon steel, I will go farther than you, and turn back later!"

"That is a wager!" Niall retorted. "My gold chased dagger against your sweaty cloak! But if you are so willing, where are the spearmen your king should be sending against the Saxons?"

"All about you. Nay, let your weapons be. We are friends, or we could have filled you with arrows half an hour ago. Four hundred Cornish warriors surround you, a wall of men to guard you from the heathen spears."

"My sentries have seen nothing, heard no sound," Drusus declared.

"Your sentries have ears attuned to crag and sea, not to these hills. Moreover, the wind blows from the water."

"What is this thy talk of Saxon spears?" Niall demanded. "We have many leagues to ride before we reach the debatable land."

"There is one here who knows more than I; let him speak. Pengear!"

A short, broad-shouldered man stepped into the firelight. Dull-finished mail, stitched so close to his hide doublet that the metal rings made no sound, covered him from neck to thigh. A plated leather cap crowned his thick locks.

"Dinas Pengear? You?"

"I, Drusus. It is long since we marched together on the eastern border. You have chosen good camping ground. Your fires can not be seen from hill or shore. But we know the smell of smoke from afar!"

"It is good to see you," the prefect exclaimed. "After five years! But Trehern spoke of Saxons, and of four hundred Cornishmen between them and us."

Dinas Pengear replied:

"He speaks truth. We keep no watch on your friendly borders. But a shepherd saw the flash of your lancepoints as you topped the first hill on our side. Word of your march flew from crest to crest, from comb to crag. It was well for you, for when the news reached me, I was stalking the landing-party from a Saxon fleet and ran it down not two leagues hence."

"A fleet!"

"Five large galleys, drawn snugly ashore in the Bay of the Hollow Crag. You planned to follow the road your engineers laid out, with the help of the tribesmen? I thought so. Do you remember the narrow pass under the Three Cromlechs? Three hundred Saxon carls await you there."

Niall laughed silently.

"You dream, Cornishman! We have ridden straight and hard from Bellerium. How could the Saxon pirates know of our journey, that they await us? Look to your flocks, for the sea-thieves seek them and not us."

Pengear stared at the speaker.

"Now what brings Drusus of Legionis and an Irishman together?" he wondered. "That brogue comes from across the western sea."

Drusus, presenting the Raven to his old companion-in-arms, explained the errand on which Niall had come to Bellerium.

"However the Saxons heard," insisted Pengear, returning to talk of the enemy, "they know, and lie in ambush to cut you off. If it were our cattle they were after, they would have dashed straight into the hills as fast as they could steal ponies, to finish their raid before we could gather in force. We know their ways too well. Yesterday, in the morning fog, a fisherman out in his boat heard their minstrels singing far out to sea, and dashed in with the news."

"Since you know where they are, why does your king not ride out against them?" Niall demanded.

"Our king is old and craves peace," the Cornish warrior answered. "Time was when no Saxon dared touch foot to Cornish soil. But Caradoc of the Strong Arm grows feeble with years, and thinks it enough to guard the borders. My small band patrols the whole coast from Cribba Head to the Nare. Our people think they have done their best for Britain if they hold their own and stand between Legionis and the Saxon shieldwalls."

"Will you join forces with us now?" Drusus asked.

"I can show you a way that leads past the ambuscade."

"We came to fight Saxons, not to flee them," answered Drusus. "And there is something strange behind this business of their laying in wait for us which must be discovered. But the pass they hold is easy to defend and hard to storm. A direct attack would be folly; even if we could get in their rear, it is no ground for heavy cavalry."

He laid his hand over his eyes, the better to concentrate on the problem.

"I think I have found a way," he said finally. "Listen, and pay close heed."

They listened. When Drusus had finished outlining his plan, Dinas Pengear muttered:

"You Romans are an ill folk to fight."

DRAWN up on the sandy beach, five graceful galleys reared their grotesquely carved heads to the shoreward bluffs. Kettles bubbled over driftwood fires, sending a rich steam of stolen goat's flesh down the wind. Between two- and three-score men were scattered about the sands, arrogantly unwatchful.

Tall, big-boned fellows, fair of hair and beard, they lounged about as if the land were their own. A few tended the kettles; others sprawled on the sand, drinking mead from looted British cups. The rest were fishing or gathering mussels. Nearly all were unarmored, their mail and weapons strewed the sand. Their rough voices boomed above the turmoil of the waves.

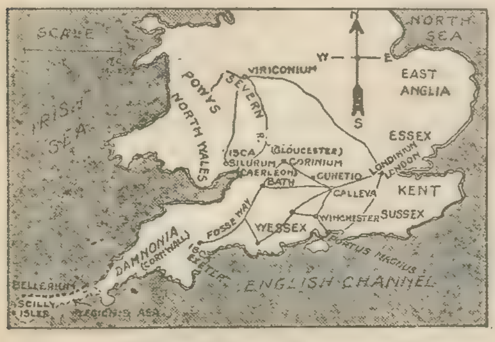
"*Etath ealle!*" shouted one of the cooks, and from all sides they ran headlong to the ready meal.

The sun, rising above the jutting headland to the east, touched the sands with warm light. With uncouth noises of tearing teeth and smacking lips, the Saxon shoreguard broke their fast. Their square, stolid faces were smeared with grease; their fierce blue eyes sparkled frostily.

Suddenly one of them leaped to his feet, crying our sharply, pointing with a half-gnawed bone toward the western headland. Through this, the Hollow Crag, that gave the bay its name, the waves had worn a tunnel-like opening that spouted foam at flood tide, but at ebb it was high and dry. It was ebb tide now—and out through the arch poured a column of mail-clad horsemen, riding two and two.

In frantic haste the pirates ran for their weapons, shook the sand out of their coats of mail and struggled into their armor. As fast as they could make ready, they drew together into a compact mass. Short would be the shrift of any stray Saxon caught outside the shieldwall when the approaching charge struck home!

A red-bearded giant, armed with a huge ax, burst among them, flung one man, then another, out of the ranks and roared an order. Swiftly the two pirates fled eastward, to reach the lower land leading to the interior. Having dispatched his messengers for aid, Redbeard bawled at his company, till he had them in hollow square, shields up, points toward the advancing horsemen.



Clear of the arch, the head of the column of cavalry wheeled smartly to the left. Inland they rode till they reached the cliffs that bounded the beach. A trumpet pealed; the well-trained chargers swung into line. Forward they trotted in double rank, stretching unbroken from cliff to surf.

Riding without stirrups, each trooper sat as if stitched to his high-peaked saddle, legs gripping the horse's flanks. The rear-rank men had drawn their straight, heavy sabers; the front rank couched their lances in the peculiar Roman way.

Unlike the medieval knight or modern lancer, the cataphract held his long spear overhand, thumb to the rear, right arm flexed like a blacksmith's raising his hammer to strike. He gripped and wielded his twelve-foot weapon as if it were a dagger. The shaft was well-balanced; a slight turn of the rider's steel-like wrist sufficed to swerve the point wide of the foeman's guard.

Again the trumpet sounded; the trot became a gallop—the gallop a charge. Straight for the front of the compact Saxon square thundered the center of the Bellerian line. Not till the lowered lance-points seemed about to bury themselves in the overlapping wall of shields did the Saxons raise their war-cry.

"Woden! Woden!" burst from their bearded lips.

At that very instant, even as the charge struck home, the level line of lance-points lifted and darted over the shieldrims into the pirates' faces.

Pierced through skull and brain, more than half the men on that side of the square were killed before they could strike a blow. The shieldwall crumbled to the ground, the charge swept through and on, unchecked. Struck on the flank and rear, the rest of the square melted away into a scattered throng of fugitives striving to reach and shove off the ships they could not defend.

Close at their heels came the avenging Britons, riding them down, thrusting their spears through fleeing backs. Into the water they followed, slashing and stabbing the heathen as they waded or strove to swim.

Redbeard alone reached the side of his stranded ship, hurled his ax aboard, and swung himself over the rail a hand's breath ahead of a darting lance. On the narrow foredeck he took his stand, blue eyes sparkling with fight, the recovered ax weaving circles of light round his head. Below, a group of cavalrymen thrust at his thighs, but he was just out of reach. The ax fell, bit off a spearhead and swung for the neck of his disarmed foeman's horse. The trooper reared his mount back, but the keen steel drew blood from the charger's chestnut face.

"Board!" shouted Drusus.

Clad as he was in full mail, he stood up in the saddle, clutched the high gunwale and threw himself over. With a bound Redbeard was upon him, ax high-swung. As it fell, Drusus flung himself to one side, and the heavy weapon buried itself in the deck. While Redbeard wrenched at it, Drusus rose, snatched out his sword, and closed. In the same second, Redbeard plucked his ax free. Steel clashed on steel; the Saxon's blow was parried, but Drusus felt his sword-arm numbed.

Two cataphracts and a Raven appeared at his side.

"Stand back!" the prefect commanded and, shifting the saber to his left hand, thrust at the pirate's throat.

Redbeard, his ax high-heaved in both hands, could neither parry nor leap back.

The point divided his beard and passed through his neck.

"That was a man!" Drusus exclaimed. "Is all clear?"

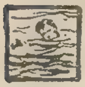
"Not a heathen lives," Niall answered him. "Shall we bring fire?"

"Aye, two fire-pots to a ship. Their runners got free in time, as I hoped. Where is Capito?"

"Here, Lord Prefect!"

"Watch for Pengear's signal from the bluffs. When the main Saxon host hears of our attack, they will doubtless come down yonder ravine to the east. See that the men are ready in good time. In the meanwhile, let them eat."

"I obey, Prefect."



SOON the five galleys were blazing merrily, the flames mounting high in the still air. A detail were clearing the beach, gathering the mail and weapons of the slain, and throwing the corpses into the sea. The rest of the squadron busied themselves with the dead men's breakfast.

Suddenly from the stern of the largest galley, now a mass of flame, a slender figure leaped through the air and splashed in the shallow water.

By chance the nearest, Drusus himself, rode down into the waves and clutched at the fugitive's shoulder. His fingers closed, not on the rough wool of a Saxon sea-coat, but on the smoothest silk. A white face looked up at him through masses of wet black hair.

"Nicator!" he exclaimed. "What do you here?"

"The pirates—captured me," the other faltered.

Drusus replied fiercely:

"No lies! No Saxons could scale our cliffs and storm Bellerium. The truth, man, if you would live!"

He dragged him ashore. Niall rode down the beach to meet them, his face dark with wrath.

"Death to the traitor!" he shouted. "He it was who betrayed our march to the Saxons. Give him to me—let a Raven pick his bones!"

A gathering throng of cataphracts echoed the cry:

"Kill him! Kill the traitor!"

"Silence!" Drusus ordered. "Not we, but the Senate, shall judge him. He goes with us, shares the risks of battle, and if we live, he goes back with us to stand his trial."

"And be acquitted through the influence of Ventidius," Niall answered. "Not so do we of the hills deal with traitors."

"Take me back with you!" implored Nicator, clutching the prefect's boot. "Let me stand trial—let me bear witness before all the Senate against Ventidius. He has betrayed me as foully as he has you."

"I knew it!" Niall shouted triumphantly.

"Be silent!" commanded Drusus. "Say on, Nicator."

The prefect's eyes were terrible. The prisoner clung to him as if the ring of hard-faced cataphracts had been so many wolves.

"Ventidius has long had secret dealings with the Saxons," Nicator revealed. "They spare his merchant ships and sell him the loot they capture from the Britons in return for gold and slaves."

"Slaves! There are not slaves enough in all Legionis Asa to buy off Saxons. Tell a true tale, man, if you hope for mercy."

"Ventidius sells those whom our courts condemn to prison or the quarries." Nicator cringed and sobbed.

"Bellerian citizens? Romans?"

"Aye."

"But why is he not discovered? The prisoners must be accounted for."

"Aye, accounted for—to—to me, as Prefect of Police. I—I report them—dead of sickness."

Drusus sat silent, till the prisoner could bear it no longer.

"Look you, Drusus!" he pleaded. "I could not help it. Years ago—I was a mere lad—I forged my father's name and seal to a false will. He had left his wealth to my sister, and left me without a copper obol. Ventidius found out, held it over my head, threatened to send me to the quarries if I did not obey him in everything. Nine years he has owned me. For him I worked against you in the Senate, for him bore to the Saxons the news of your departure.

"How does he communicate with the Saxons?" Drusus asked.

Nicator was silent, afraid.

Drusus understood.

"I will protect you," he said, "and if we return alive, I will entreat the Senate to deal mercifully with you. Now—tell me."

"The saints reward you—" Nicator began, but Drusus cut him short.

"How does Ventidius send word to the Saxons?" he demanded curtly.

"By showing a light at a certain point on the cliffs behind the city, where it can be seen from offshore, but not by the watchers on St. Mary's Mount. It can be seen only on calm and moonless nights, when a Saxon galley can send in a boat to the patch of beach at the foot of the cliff.

"Then a man is let down by a rope to speak with them. With threats of publishing the papyrus that was proof of my shame to all the city, if I refused, Ventidius forced me to ascend the cliff, the night after you set out. On the strand below I told the Saxon captain—him with the red beard whom you slew on his own foredeck—that you rode east that day with a hundred lances.

"My message delivered, I tugged at the rope as a signal to Ventidius on the cliff above to haul me up. But the rope remained slack: He did not haul me up. Instead he laughed at me, and the Saxon seized me from behind, and bore me helpless in his great arms to the boat, stepped in and bade the rowers thrust off. They had an understanding with Ventidius—may the Eternal Torments that await him be redoubled for it!—that whoever he sent as messengers were to be killed or sold into slavery overseas. Let me but set foot in Bellerium again ——"

"Enough!" Drusus silenced him. "They are signaling from the cliffs—the landing-party are returning. I can spare no man to guard you, Nicator."

"I give my parole not to escape."

"I care not for that, since no escape is possible. But as you love your life, keep out of sword's reach of my men."

Without sound of trumpet or command, the cataphracts and Ravens again drew up in line upon the sands. Minutes passed in silent tension; then a torrent of horsemen burst from the steep ravine near the eastern headland.

They kept no order; the swiftest of their stolen ponies set the pace, the rest following hugger-mugger in frenzied eagerness to save the burning ships. At the sight of the smoking hulks, the Saxons burst into yells of rage. With brandished axes and tossing spears, they rode in a ragged swarm toward the motionless Bellerian line.

"Now!" thundered Drusus.

The cataphracts spurred forward, gaining momentum at every stride. Outnumbered as they were, the Britons had all the advantage. In their lust for revenge, the Saxons had taken no thought of the superior weight and training of the heavy-armed troopers on their big-boned horses. Unused to fighting from the saddle, the Saxons had planned to dash part way along the beach, dismount and charge in a solid wedge. They were mounted infantry who had never before faced charging cavalry.

The serried line of tall Irish chargers stampeded the little hill ponies or bowled them over, trampled them and their riders, and swept on, while the Bellerian lances rose dripping. Clear over the heathen the squadron rode, halted, broke into four troops of cataphracts and one of Ravens, and charged back. The reddened, trampled beach writhed with crippled ponies and mangled men.

BUT the Saxons were no cowards. As their first riders fell, those behind dismounted swiftly, and strove to form a shieldwall. Though the cataphracts rolled over them before they could mass, they lashed out bravely with sword and ax, fighting in groups, in pairs back to back, or singly against the swinging sabers and stabbing lances. Stalwart men all, soldiers from boyhood, they sold their lives as dearly as they could.

A javelin pierced Drusus' horse as he rode on the right flank of the charging line. He flung himself from the saddle as the horse pitched forward in mid-stride. The line swept past him as he rose.

An ax rang against his shield. He thrust, felt the point grind against mail, and swinging, launched a tremendous back-stroke. His adversary threw up his shield, caught the blow on the iron boss, and howled as the steel bit through shield and arm beneath. Drusus tugged to free the blade, but it struck in the tough limewood. The Saxon cast the shield aside, drew his broad, curved knife, and sprang for the prefect's throat.

Disarmed, Drusus caught the Saxon's wrist, wrestling to snatch the knife away. Strong as he was, and hard with constant exercise and clean living, the heathen was a fair match for him. Back and forth they struggled, their breath hot on each other's faces.

At last Drusus, holding his opponent's knife-hand with his left, tore his right free, and planted his fist full in the Saxon's face. He felt the tug as his man reeled back, fingers unclenching, knife falling to the sand. As Drusus shoved him off, a body fell at his feet. Looking up, he saw Nicator standing beside him, a dripping Saxon sword in his hand.

"That one would have cut you down from behind," he panted. "I am out of practice, but once I could fence well."

"Well struck, Nicator!"

Tearing his own sword free from the stunned Saxon's shield, Drusus looked to see how went the battle. Cut off in isolated groups, scarce two-score Saxons still fought on with the courage of despair. Presently, spent and wounded, they flung down their arms.

"Turn them loose without their weapons," Drusus commanded. "Let them make their peace with the Cornishmen as best they may. I can manage no prisoners, but I will not kill beaten men."

The brazen trumpets of Legionis rang out in triumph. While half a troop chased the disarmed Saxons inland, others were detailed to bury their dead. The slain heathen they left to the scavenging birds. Such was the force of the Bellerian onset, such the advantage of their weight and discipline, that they had lost but five men killed and seven seriously wounded.

The first body they laid to rest in the common grave was that of the Cornish miner Trehern. On the broad bare chest, pierced by a Saxon spear, Niall the Raven silently placed his own gold-hilted dagger. It had been fairly won.

Dinas Pengear and an exultant handful of his shock-headed patrol came down from the bluffs. Heavy was the toll they had taken from the Saxon rearguard in the mad race from the Three Cromlechs to the sea.

"Leave your wounded with me, Drusus," he urged. "I will take good care of them, and see them safe back to the border when they recover. I take it you must press on."

"I must," the prefect answered. "My thanks, Dinas, and the thanks of my people."

The injured men raised a cry of protest. But—

"No, lads," Drusus said, "you can not ride on. Your wounds would stiffen and fester. When you see Castellum Maris again, tell the stay-at-homes that all is well with Britain while Legionis holds the field."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SAXONS COME

THE center horseman of the three straightened his huge old frame, removed the helmet from his bald head, and wiped the sweat from his wrinkled brow and forked beard. Black as in his glowing youth, the beard of Owain of North Wales streamed over the mail rings on his mighty chest. His eyes, tired with the long days of riding, yet peered keen and fierce from beneath snow-white shaggy brows.

"Pray God that we be not too late!" said Kyndylan, Prince of Viriconium, who rode at the king's right.

He surveyed the rolling, wooded country between the Glevum-Aquæ Sulis road and the old, primeval way that lay east to Corinium, a day's march away. A spare, worried man was Kyndylan, prematurely aged by a life of futile striving to hold his bickering subjects together, clear of vision and weak of soul.

"Rather pray we may not be too early!" Owain pointed to the south, toward Aquæ. "Yonder, not in Corinium, lies the key to the future. We stand, half-prepared, between the West Saxons and the southwest. Brochwel of Powys is not ready to march; the half-Romans of Legionis Asa have not answered my embassy. If the Saxon force the issue, the battle will decide the fate of Britain before we are strong enough to fight on even terms."

"What is this of even terms?" spoke he who rode on Owain's other side. A short man of massive girth, swarthy and heavy-featured, with restless eyes and lips. "I have heard that Owain ap Urien once asked no better terms of the heathen than long odds against him and a sharp sword in his hand. Has age rusted his courage? On to Corinium, I say, and may Woden help his godless worshippers if he can!"

Owain's wise old eyes twinkled tolerantly at the hot-headed chief.

"Spoken like a true Briton, Farimael of the Great Shield!" he answered. "I would give my kingdom to hear all Welshmen speak with one voice as you have spoken, for then we should have swords, not promises, behind our banners. Quick word, quick sword, quick levies—such is the motto of your South Welsh. Yet I will thank Christ if you be not as quick to flee."

He of the Great Shield was stung, and quick to show it.

"Nay," Owain hastened his words, "no offense, Farimael. You have never faced the Saxon wedge before, and I have met it twelve times. Let Ceawlin of Wessex take the field, and that great shield of yours will be too small to hide your gallant breast."

Farimael was flushing angrily.

"Two thousand men have I brought you," he cried, "two thousand, against the eighteen hundred of Kyndylan, and the five hundred Irish horse that rode with you from Cumbria. Yet you scoff at me, scorn my courage."

"As you but now scorned mine, and with as good reason. It is not your courage, Farimael, but your youth and inexperience——! Look yonder!"

Owain reined in. Behind him his horsemen halted, with clank of scabbard and jingle of mail. Far in the rear of the five hundred black-cloaked Ravens, the ill-armed, undisciplined warriors of Wales tailed off in ragged array: Small sinewy men, hardy and brave, but unused to fighting in open country.

They had halted at the junction of the Roman road with the ancient native track running east-northeast to Corinium, twenty miles away. Before them rose a dense cloud of white dust, mantling the old trail and spreading in an impalpable haze among the gently sloping hills on either side.

As Owain and his men gazed, faint cries began to come to them from the cloud: Cries of pain, of weariness, of distress. A groan burst from Kyndylan's breast.

"Ours!" he cried, wringing his hands. "I see no gleam of weapons, hear no Saxon shouts. Did you hear? They call on us for help!"

Owain glanced over his shoulder.

"Connal!" he called.

A heavy-set officer of Ravens rode up to him.

"Spur thither, Connal, and bring me word."

The dark-bearded Connal galloped down the road; and even as he sped, the dust-cloud thinned, disclosing ragged, limping men who stretched out their arms to their distant countrymen and wept, half from despair and half from sheer relief. Behind, glimpses of fluttering robes, and higher, more plaintive cries, told of the fear of women.

The king sat silent as Connal rode back, the refugees following in a weak-kneed attempt to run. The Raven's face was set and sad.

"Corinium fell yesterday," he reported. "These be those who fled. Three hundred of the garrison guard their rear. Eight hundred perished in the defense. These—" he jerked his hand toward the crowds behind— "know not how many the Saxons are. We must wait for the warriors."

Exhausted with grief, terror and the night-long flight, the refugees stumbled forward to the Roman road, and fell on their knees before the Welsh array, weeping and pleading for help. Owain's eyes filled with tears at the sight of the old men and women, the mothers with babes at the breast, young girls with bleeding feet and children whose lips were dry and cracked. Last of all, still erect and steady of pace, came the beaten remnant of the Corinium garrison.

Farimael of the Great Shield clenched his fists and cursed. A deep-throated growl of rage ran through the Welsh ranks; only the stern-faced Ravens sat silent in their saddles. Owain beckoned to him the officer commanding the Corinians.

"Ceawlin?" asked the King.

"Ceawlin," the officer affirmed.

"How many are they?"

"Close to five thousand," the Corinian answered. "They smothered our defense as locusts grain. We did our best: Well nigh a thousand of them are now roasting in ——. We go to Aquæ Sulis."

"Well fought!" Owain commended him. "It is no light thing for Britons, even behind walls, to take more than life for life from Ceawlin's Saxons. But they struck more quickly than I dreamed. Are they mounted? Were ye not pursued?"

"Mounted they are," the Corinian officer replied, "on horses they stole by the way. The king's thanes pursued us, while the rest pillaged, but we beat them off. Oh, Corinium, fair city of my fathers!"

His lament stirred Farimael.

"On!" he shouted in a ringing voice. "On to Corinium, to avenge our dead! Let us make her walls a monument to the gallant men who gave their lives for her! Death to the Saxons!"

His fierce Silurian tribesmen echoed the shout, but Owain caught hold of Farimael's rein.

"Man, you are mad!" he rebuked him. "Would you attack Saxons—men of greater mold than we and better armed—sheltered behind Roman walls? You would doom six men to avenge every one that perished."

Farimael squirmed under the restraint.

"Wait, rash lad," the old King continued, "your chance will come soon enough. The heathen have horses. Corinium is for them but the first stroke. As fast as they can loot and burn Corinium, they will ride on to Aquæ or to Glevum and bring the sword to our very altars. Wait for them, wait for them—they will come !"

"Aye, wait, but where?" snarled Farimael. "Glevum is north of us, Aquæ south. Do we wait at Aquæ, while they destroy Glevum—or at Glevum while they destroy Aquæ?"

Owain pointed over his shoulder.

"Behind us lies Brig Hill, crowned with a fortress built long ago by the Men of the Flint. Turn, and you will see its crest. The earthen walls enclose a camp of twenty acres, large enough for all our host. We have food, there are springs on the slope. I mind we camped there once before the fight of Badon, when good King Arthur lived."

"What?" cried Farimael in scorn. "Hide behind walls, while the blood of Britons cries out for vengeance? Never! Who rides with me to Corinium?"

The South Welsh behind his banners, blazoned with the red dragon, raised a joyful shout:

"On! On! Lead the way, Great Shield!"

The young prince spurred past Owain; but the old king bellowed forth an order, and the Ravens rode in between Farimael and his followers.

"You shall not go!" the king commanded. "While Owain lives, you shall not cast away our last hope. I command you to wait."

Scarcely were the words uttered when the Corinium officer, too, leaped at Farimael's rein, and between him and the king the hot-headed prince was brought to a standstill. Facing Owain, the officer demanded:

"You are Owain ap Urien, the Champion of Britain?"

"I am Owain," the king answered.

"Then, by the saints, I who have shed my blood for Corinium, counsel you men of Britain to follow Owain, and heed not this madman here. Twelve times has Owain broken the Saxon ranks, twelve times have his ravens saved this land. If ye ride forward, ye ride to death on the Saxon blades. Get ye to Brig Hill, as Owain bids!"

"Loose me then!" Farimael ordered bruskly. "You who have tasted those Saxon blades should know. Lead on, Owain!"

FROM the watch-tower above the westward battlements of Corinium a horn sang clear in the early dawn. An armored thane ran down the tower stairs and through the streets of looted shops and pillaged dwellings till he came to the forum.

There, beside emptied wine-casks and still smouldering bonfires of last night's debauch, following the capture of the city, hundreds of sprawling warriors snored on the flagstones, red with Christian blood. Only a few raised their heads and gazed with dull and swollen eyes at the thane as he crossed the forum and entered the desecrated and plundered church, where Ceawlin, King of the West Saxons, sat at meat with his brother Cuthwine.

"The Britons!" cried the thane.

Leaping up from the communion-table and wiping his beard on the jewelled altar cloth, Ceawlin strode out to the church door and blew a blast on his gold-banded war horn. Trumpet called to trumpet throughout the city, thanes sped from house to house rousing the warriors. From the baths, naked and dripping, came those who had been sobering themselves in the great tank of cold water, dressing as they ran.

To speed the stragglers who refused to rise or who lingered to search for buried treasure, the king commanded firebrands to be thrown into wood cellars and upper windows. Flames burst through roofs, and swiftly spread from house to house, from street to street of doomed Corinium.

A straggling column poured out through the shattered gates, assembled on the plain and awaited orders. Their eyes still bloodshot from too much British wine, the Saxons gazed down the road for the first signs of the advancing enemy. But stare as they would, no signs could they see.

Ceawlin rode up at the head of a superb body of about one hundred and fifty mounted men. Their swords and battle axes were hafted and chased with gold, broad spiral bands of the precious metal encircled their brawny arms, their scabbards and spurs were gilded. The crests of their helmets were shaped like the head of a wild boar.

All wore mail shirts of the finest and strongest weave, and not a few had in addition cuisses or thigh-pieces. They rode good horses and bore themselves like trained and disciplined men.

These were the thanes, the king's personal followers: Nobility, parliament and household troops in one. All they possessed came from his bounty. They were picked champions, bound to his service by rich gifts, his closest companions in peace or war, in the banquet hall or on the battlefield.

Cuthwine, brother to the king, but looking in his arrogant young beauty more like a son, had his own bodyguard of perhaps one hundred and twenty thanes. They were a gallant company; but they plainly lacked not only the gold but the more precious experience and discipline of the royal thanes. At the taking of the city, Cuthwine's thanes had dispersed and plundered like the churls of the rank and file, leaving the king's bodyguard to pursue the fleeing townsfolk and be beaten off, outnumbered, by the stubborn British rearguard.

Ceawlin rode down the ranks of his infantry, inspecting the sturdy churls and scanning their arms. Satisfied, he waved an arm toward where the horses of the host grazed together, encircled and watched by yawning riders.

"To horse!" he shouted.

The ranks broke, every man rushing toward the herd. He who came first had his pick of the mounts, and he who came last turned away in disgust, for the battle and the tendency to stray of the three-quarters wild ponies had left only half enough for the host. Soon a scant two thousand men were mounted; the rest, afoot and out of temper, formed up again before the gate.

Ceawlin raised his hand and the grumbling churls fell silent.

"My people," he addressed them, "I have called you from the pillage of one poor town to the rich loot of the great cities of the West. Before us lies the camp of Bath, which the Christians call Aquæ Sulis, and Gleawseaster the proud. No man may tell the treasures, the dark-browed women, the weapons of costly steel, which lie therein.

"All these be yours for the taking. That ye might have them, I caused my thanes to spread a false report of the foe's approach. We must set forth in haste, before the hosts of all Wales gather to oppose us. If we delay, those jewel-bright cities may never be ours. On then, and Woden send us victory!"

For a moment dull surprise fell on the Saxon hordes. At the cry that the Britons were in sight, they had swarmed out for instant battle; now, learning that there was no foe, their wine-dulled brains refused to act.

But their King's cunning words filtered through surprize and stale wine-fumes. At the hint of richer plunder than they had ever known, their fancy was fired, and they broke into wild cries of rejoicing. They tossed their weapons high, beat upon their shields, and called on Ceawlin to lead them forward.

But Ceawlin called his brother to him, and gave young Cuthwine orders that well-nigh broke the lad's heart.

"The townsfolk have had a long start," he said. "It may be that they have already roused the Welsh along the Severn. I will press on with the mounted men; do you take command of the foot and follow as fast as you may by the ancient track. We take the paved road to the southwest, and if there be none to oppose us, south to Bath. If either of us hears the clash of steel on the way, let him march to the other's aid. If not, we meet at Bath."

Wheeling his horse, the King of the West Saxons sounded the advance. The thanes swung into column behind him, and the mounted churls rode after down the long, straight Roman road. Before them lay new cities to storm and sack; behind them the smoke rolled high above the blood stained battlements of Corinium.

CHAPTER IX

THE HILL OF SLAUGHTER

"THERE our spies found them at midnight."

Standing on the eastern rampart in the first light of morning, Owain pointed down the slope of Brig Hill toward a white villa set in a tree-dotted plain.

"Ceawlin has come for us," he continued. "He must have seen our camp fires from the Aquæ road, and crossed with his army over the grass land, which would muffle the tread of their horses, to yonder villa and encamped. Connal reports a second force, as large again, arrived on foot just before dawn. Order the best armed of your South Welsh to the entrance and the rampart on its left. Bid Kyndylan hold the north wall. I and my Ravens will wait without the fosse, hidden by the curve of the high rampart to the south."

Farimael's impatient frown melted into a grin of delight.

"I thank thee, Lord Owain," he cried, "for granting me the post of honor. Never a Saxon shall win a foot of ground from the Red Dragon of South Wales!"

The highest point between the Corinium road and the Cotteswolds, Brig Hill ran smoothly down toward the eastern plain. To the west it pitched abruptly, the steep slope broken by wooded ravines, impossible to storm. Due north and south, the main highway from Aquæ Sulis to Glevum ran straight as an arrow, save where it curved in a wide sweep about the eastern foot of the hill.

Above this curve in the highroad the ancient earthwork was doubled to protect the only entrance. The stone age engineer who had laid it out had shaped the foot like a broken circle, the right hand limb being prolonged in a spiral past the break and outside the left hand wall, thus forming a narrow vestibule seventy feet long, most difficult to force.

As Owain issued his instructions to the Prince of South Wales, Kyndylan, weary with lack of sleep, came up and overheard. Vehemently he protested, while Farimael strode off to plant his standard, the Red Dragon, above the rampart.

"Your Ravens are needed to line the wall," the Viriconian urged. "Our forces are too scant to man the works without them."

"My Ravens are riders, who fight best in the saddle. Posted behind the crest of the ridge, they will command the Saxon flank, unseen till they strike." Again he pointed down the hill. "See! The flash of mail! They form!"

Swiftly the Saxon riders assembled in a long narrow column that advanced across the billowing fields, pink with the bloom of the wild sainfoin.

"To your posts!" Owain shouted.

His voice was drowned in a wild yell, as the Britons rushed to man the wall, beneath the banners of their respective princes. Dropping over the rampart, Owain walked leisurely round to the far side of the hill, where his Ravens were waiting his command to mount.

"I see no footman," grumbled Kyndylan, after the departing form of the King. "It was ill done to deny the place of honor to us who have Roman blood in our veins. Yonder horse are not over two thousand."

And he peered with discontent into the morning sun.

Straight to the foot of Brig Hill the Saxons rode. There they halted, and all but a few dismounted. Two hundred still bestrode their horses, beside the hard-swearing handful detailed to picket and guard the others' mounts. The rest formed a compact wedge of infantry, tipped with a solid triangle of picked warriors. Beside the wedge rode the King of Wessex, splendid in burnished mail.

The scattered Welsh archers bent their bows as the Saxon horse deployed into a ragged line.

"They come!" shouted Farimael, raising his great oval shield of bronze. "Stand fast, for Wales and the Red Dragon!"

Straight on for the nearest face of the wall came the Saxon riders, their horses taking the hill in great bounds. Behind, the wedge clanked steadily forward, keeping perfect formation, shield lapped over shield.

Shrieking with excitement and defiance, the Welsh could scarce wait for their foes to close. Nearer and nearer came the charging line. Then through the drumming of their hoofbeats suddenly rolled a long, sullen roar, as of the sea on a rocky strand. Over the shoulder of the hill, below the southern wall, swept rank after rank of black-armored men on great black steeds, broadswords high-heaved above their black-plumed helmets.

"The Ravens!" Kyndylan sang out as the foremost rushed past his banner.

As a great wave strikes some doomed ship, so did Owain's squadrons smite the riders of Ceawlin. Ignorant of the Ravens lurking in ambush, they were taken by surprize, struck on the flank and crumpled up.

The trained Irish chargers trampled their ill-broken ponies with hoofs of iron.

The Ravens swooped down hill on the heels of the flying survivors. The frightened ponies crashed into the solid shieldwall of the main Saxon host, tore through the foremost ranks, kicking and screaming. Hard after them loomed the black riders, till they crumpled the apex of the wedge and drove it inward. But behind, the Saxon ranks held fast, pushing forward in an attempt to roll the Ravens back, till the footmen of Wessex were crowded helplessly together.

From the rampart the Welsh looked on, their eyes ablaze.

"Follow me, Britons!" shouted Farimael, leaping down from the wall. "The heathen break!"

Like a falling torrent, the Welsh poured down from the wall. But even as they gathered for the charge, Owain's trumpet sounded the retreat.

The shrewd old king was not deceived by the apparent confusion of the Saxons. He knew the desperate courage, the crafty cunning of Ceawlin. Well he had learned the lesson that Saxons do not flee till their foe was paid the price of victory ten times over. His own five hundred horse, the hope of Britain, could not prevail against the sheer weight of Ceawlin's two thousand.

With one last flurry of sword-strokes, the Ravens wheeled, and rode back up the hill. A roar of triumph rose from the Saxon ranks.

His face dark with anger, Farimael saw the Ravens ride back to cover, the Saxons rally and turn their spears toward his ragged ranks. Fierce as he was, the sight of the huge men of Wessex rolling on in compact order struck terror to his heart. Closer and closer pressed the shieldwall, silent, inexorable.

"Back to the walls!"

The voice of Owain rang high above the turmoil. The South Wales instinctively obeyed.

An arrow-flight distant, the enemy halted. The Welsh, their eyes hot with hate, saw a man in breastplate and cuisses of ring-mail advance from the Saxon wedge, his steel-clad arms adorned with heavy spirals of twisted gold, his helmet surmounted with a golden circlet. Wide-shouldered and huge of stature, Ceawlin of Wessex calmly studied the earthwork and its defenders.

"Loose!" commanded Owain.

A thin flight of arrows flew from the British bows. Baffled by the long range and the sun in their eyes, the Welsh shot badly. Ceawlin gave a command.

Out from the wedge stepped some three hundred men, sheathing their swords and slinging shields. From their shoulders they took stout bows of elm, loosened the arrows in their quivers, and gathered about the king.

At a second order, they ran rapidly down the hill and took cover in the willows that fringed one of the ravines on the north-eastern slope.

Still the shieldwall waited, while the Britons shouted taunts and insults. A slow smile lighted the scarred features of Ceawlin as he noted the rising tone of anger in their cries. Gradually the Welshmen worked themselves up into a fighting fury. Farimael of the Great Shield took his post directly above the Saxon king, glared down at him in frenzy.

Ceawlin, smiling still, called mockingly:

"Come down, Briton, and exchange a blow with a man! Such arms as yours were meant for better work than embracing women."

Farimael's eyes rolled in fury.

"When I come, heathen dog," he roared, "I will tear your joints from their sockets! I will give that ax of yours to my servants to cut fagots with, and have your yellow hair woven into a dishclout!"

"And I," Ceawlin answered coolly, "will make your shield into a cradle for my British children!"

Farimael could stand no more.

"Up and at them!" he yelled.

But Owain appeared beside him and interfered once more.

"Stand fast!" he warned. "The Saxon is matchless in the open. Let him break himself on these walls."

Snatching up a javelin, Farimael hurled it with all his great strength, redoubled by baffled rage. Saxon and Briton alike shouted in astonishment as it hummed through the air as if launched from a giant's bow. Ceawlin ceased to smile and leaped aside. There was a sound of tearing metal and a gash a hand's breath wide opened in the slack of his mail birnie.

"Good arm, Welshman!" he cried.

Plucking the javelin from where it quivered in the ground beside him, he sent it back with a force that buried it deep in the earthen wall.

As he turned to pick up the javelin, he saw that for which he was waiting. A cry from the wall announced that the Britons had also seen. Company after company of Saxon men-at-arms were streaming across the fields in the direction of Brig Hill. The best of Cuthwine's men were now ready to join the fight.

Forming a second shieldwall, a thousand strong, they threatened the north side of the earthwork, as the first wedge threatened the east. Now Ceawlin shouted his war-cry, and the two hosts of Wessex advanced simultaneously, while a third—the balance of Cuthwine's army—approached through the fields.

SILENT, saving their breath for the struggle, the thanes advanced at the head of the assault. The Welsh screamed the bitter hatred of a people pillaged, outraged, dispossessed. Their handful of archers loosed as fast as they could fit shaft to string; javelins tore through mail. Gaps opened in the advancing lines, only to close again. The Saxons pressed on to the foot of the earthern wall.

Foremost in the attack, Ceawlin forced his way to the top of the wall, his great ax circling about his head. Clanging on Farimael's shield, it recoiled, flashed again, striking down a Welsh swordsman.

Farimael's point thrust between Ceawlin's upraised arm, to be turned aside by the double links of the Saxon's birnie. Simultaneously the two champions raised their weapons; but before they could strike Farimael was swept away by a sudden rush of his own men to the north side of the fort, where Cuthwine's host threatened to drive the Welsh from the wall.

Too many Britons rushed to repel this second assault, leaving only a handful to hold off Ceawlin's weakening attack. Instantly the Saxon king cried on his thanes to the storm. Up and over the wall they surged, the churls following in dense masses. Outnumbered, the Welsh fell back into the interior of the fort.

Owain ordered the Viriconians to counter attack. British in blood, but heirs to the decaying Roman culture of the Midlands, they wheeled and charged together, beneath an ancient ensign topped with a tarnished eagle. They struck the Saxons on the flank, driving it in, and relieving the pressure on the South Welsh. At that moment Farimael, having rolled back the Saxon right, returned at the head of his men and smote the other flank of Ceawlin's now wavering array.

Rear-guarded by Ceawlin and his veteran thanes, the Saxons retreated step by step. About them hung the exultant Welsh, hacking and thrusting. The invaders were thrust back over the wall, and beaten down with savage blows. Halting just beyond javelin-cast, they stubbornly closed up and held their ground.

On the opposite side of the fort, Owain dropped over the wall to rejoin his Ravens, who still waited the time for the final blow. The Champion now felt that the fight had forged the squabbling Welsh into an harmonious whole, and that he could safely entrust the defense of the walls to Farimael.

Becoming aware of the disaster to his brother, Ceawlin sent a thane running with fresh orders. Then, standing his ground, he raised a weaponless hand and cried aloud to the Britons for a parley. The panting victors waited for his words.

"Well have ye fought, Welshmen!" Ceawlin paid his first tribute to British warriors. "So well, that it must be Owain of North Wales is with you. Is it so?"

Farimael grinned at him from the rampart.

"It is so, heathen!" he answered. "But forget not that Farimael of the Great shield is also here, as yon crow-meat on your right can bear witness."

"I am not like to forget it. But I warn you, Briton, that the battle is not won till the last blow is struck. Have ye ever known Ceawlin of Wessex to give up land whereon his warriors have once set their feet? If ye are wise ye will make terms.

"I offer this choice: Make peace with me, accept me as your overlord, and live in enjoyment of your lands, or—share the fate of the southern shore. I offer your alliance or destruction; there is no other choice."

Farimael laughed loud and long.

"I do not treat with heathen!" he answered. "Nor with beaten men!"

"Nor do I treat with underlings, but with their masters. Where is Owain?"

Farimael scowled savagely.

"Think you," he asked, "that Owain ap Urien, King of Battles, the Sword and Shield of Britain, will acknowledge you his master? Flee, idol worshipper, before death takes you! Britons bow only to God and to their chosen king."

"As you will!" Ceawlin laughed shortly, and blew a blast on his war-horn. His shieldwall began a slow, determined advance.

On the right, the men of Cuthwine, heartened by the new order from their king, came on to the assault. Behind them, with shouts of encouragement, the thousand fresh warriors of the Saxon rearguard swarmed up the hill to reenforce Cuthwine's hard-handled churls.

The Welsh settled again to the defense. Kyndylan of Viriconium now held the left of the entrance, with a scattering along the south and the impregnable east. Farimael held the entrance itself and the walls to the north, where Cuthwine and the eager rearguard were advancing. The south was not threatened: Ceawlin had had enough of Owain's horse.

Suddenly, as Cuthwine drew within arrow-flight, his ranks divided. Between them, shoulder to shoulder, stood a column of archers. As the spearmen drew farther apart, these deployed, drew their bows, and shot at the Welsh defending the earthwork. Kneeling or lying before them on the trampled turf were axe- and pike-men, ready at need to rise and form a wall of steel between the archers and the Welsh swords.

Three hundred bows loosed together an intolerable rain of steel. In vain Farimael called upon his own archers to return the arrow-flight; scattered among his host, they could direct no such concentrated hail as the Saxons poured upon them. The Welsh were forced to take cover behind the rampart, and even there the barbed shafts, shot at a high angle, dropped upon their heads and shoulders.

At last that which Farimael dreaded—and yet half hoped for—came. The wall, being stripped of its defenders, Cuthwine led his churls over the top of the earthwork. Stumbling over British bodies, slipping in pools of blood, the Saxons flooded the crest with their numbers.

Rallying his weary fighters, Farimael barred the way between their advance and Kyndylan's flank. Cuthwine himself, his young face alight with the joy of victory, was the first to meet him. The Saxon's sword cut the crest from Farimael's helmet. The black-haired prince glutted the fury in his heart with one cheerful stroke that bit through Cuthwine's birnie and clove the shoulder to the breast. Wrenching his sword free, Farimael hurled himself into the fight.

A bearded thane struck down the British banner-bearer, forced the staff from his dying hand, and shook the Red Dragon vauntingly in the sight of the struggling hosts.

Kyndylan saw that the fight was lost unless help came quickly. He sent a runner to Owain. Streaked with blood, one arm hanging limp and pierced by an arrow, the messenger flung himself at Owain's feet. With tortured lungs he gasped out his plea for help, and fell fainting on the grass.

"If they could have held out a little longer!" Owain groaned. His face was dark with grief. "Follow me, Ravens! We ride to win or die!"

With thunderous hoofs his five hundred horsemen galloped over the crest, descended like a storm-cloud as they made the sloping circuit of the wall, and fell on Ceawlin's shieldwall. Too late, as he led that gallent charge, Owain saw the rear of Cuthwine's column, fresh from victory, sweep back down the hill and around the base of Ceawlin's wedge.

Owain, ancient champion of twelve fights, wielded his weapon with the vigor of youth. His arm, once the strongest of those about King Arthur, had lost little of its power. His unsurpassed skill of fence brought death to thane and churl alike. Ceawlin, pressed against the wall, could not come to hearten his warriors; his brazen voice was drowned by the clash and clang of weapons.

As fast as the heathen fell before them, the Irishmen spurred their mounts deeper and deeper into the mass of weary Saxons. They were fighting now to right and left and front, mercilessly forcing a gap between the struggling ranks of their dogged foes. A little more, and they would be through, would wheel, charge back again, and smash the shieldwall to bloody shards.

But time was not given them. In the midst of their desperate struggle, the warriors despatched by the chief of the slain Cuthwine's thanes rushed up, closing the gap behind them. The Saxon spears, thrusting in from behind, brought down horse and rider in one red overthrow. Hemmed in on all sides, the Ravens were caged.

Kyndylan saw from the wall, and knew that all was lost. In that black moment, his soul forgot its weakness and rose to heights of glory. Crying his men on, he flung himself upon the iron ranks of Ceawlin. The bold attempt at rescue seemed for a moment to succeed. Kyndylan broke through the Saxon front, shaken as it was by Owain's charge. But Ceawlin led his own men in a furious counter-charge, met the Britons full on, and rolled them back over the rampart.

At bay in a circle of dying foes, Owain cheered on his dying Ravens. Weary and sorely wounded, a tiny fragment of the gallant squardons that had nearly turned the tide, they struck on to the hopeless last.

Owain still held out. Hands reached for him, to drag him down alive; but his shortened point struck here and there, daunting the fiercest. At last a javelin, hurled from behind, drove through his back. He summoned his ebbing strength for one last blow, and reeling, brought the great sword down blindly, and slid from the saddle. As he fell, an ax crashed through his brain.

KYNDYLAN, twice wounded, saw the king fall. Once more he turned upon the foe in a fury of vengeance. His blade pierced the throat of a Saxon thane; and on the instant, an arrow shot at random lodged in Kyndylan's eye.

But Farimael, too, had seen, where he still held his own with less than a hundred men, wedged in the barricaded inner mouth of the entrance. Roaring like a wounded bull, Farimael of South Wales urged his war-worn hillmen to a glorious death. His mighty arm tore a path through the thick of the enemy, till he found himself face to face with Ceawlin.

"Well done, Welshman!" The Saxon king praised his enemy even as he struck. "Better foeman have I never met. Ugh! Your shield is strong!"

In silence Farimael struck back. The force of the blow would have split Ceawlin's skull but for the tough crest that turned it. The steel cap flew from the Saxon's head; he reeled, recovered, and grasping his ax in both hands, lashed out for his opponent's shoulder.

The bronze shield came up, parried the stroke, and then sagged, as its great weight tugged at the weary arm behind. It was Ceawlin who recovered first. Holding his ax half-way up the haft, he feinted with the knobbed butt, and as Farimael too slowly shifted his shield, the ax-blade tore through the cords of his neck.

Ceawlin snatched up the severed head and waved the ghastly trophy above the hosts. The hearts of the surviving Britons sickened at the sight. Flinging down their arms, they fled wildly toward the western wall, where alone there were no Saxons to head them off. The shattered army ran like sheep, stopping neither to round up their scattered horses nor to put up a rear-guard fight. He who first reached the shelter of the wooded ravines was safest.

Expecting them to flee across country toward the Severn, Ceawlin bade his men mount and pursue. Cuthwine's host was already astride the Glevum road. But instead of continuing their flight west, the stricken Britons turned to the base of the hill, lost to sight as they were among the trees, and pelted off toward the southern road leading to Aquæ Sulis, nine miles away.

Not till his horsemen had disappeared in the wooded valleys to the west did Ceawlin see the fragments of Owain's army racing headlong toward Aquæ. It was too late then to overtake them.

A thane came up, his scarred face dripping blood.

"Where is Cuthwine?" the king asked.

"Dead. The swarthy one with the brazen shield slew him."

Ceawlin turned a stricken face to the sky, now overcast with thunder-clouds.

"A bitter price have I paid thee for victory, Father Woden!" he cried. "Give me revenge, a thousand fold!"

His eyes dropped. Weighed down by grief, he muttered:

"A hard man, he of the bronze shield! I knew he was fated to work me harm. A tough man, and a tough folk. But Owain is dead."

He gazed, unseeing, down the dusty Aquæ road.

"Owain is dead, and the Ravens peck no more. Woden send every man such enemies! Ordlaf! Seek out the corpse of Owain, build a pyre on the crest, and burn him with all honor. Woden loves a man."

CHAPTER X

BY THE WATERS OF SUL

HALTING on the crest of the rolling downs, Drusus pointed down the fosse way, which led straight ahead to the walls of Aquæ Sulis.

"Aquæ at last!" he said to Niall, riding beside him.

The ramparts, moated on three sides by a loop of the twisting Avon, loomed gray and ghostly in the long English twilight.

"A little town, but gay," Drusus commented. "See how its houses gleam with lights, though it is not yet dark!"

Niall's keen eyes caught sight of moving white-clad figures on the road from the city gate to the nearest gate.

"Look there!" he cried. "What do you make of that?"

A mere trickle at first, the far-off figures grew into a thin stream that poured from the city toward the river.

"They flee!" exclaimed Drusus in dismay.

"Aye, they flee," the Raven echoed gloomily, "and from what, if not the Saxons? In ——'s name, Prefect, let us ride!"

Niall thought of the real Gwenlian, left ill in Aquæ.

The column of cataphracts and Ravens trotted briskly to the river, clattered across the bridge, and halted as the foremost fugitives came running up. At the sight of armed horsemen barring the way, the fleeing crowd recoiled with cries of terror, turned in their tracks, and fled back toward the town. With an oath, Niall of the Sword spurred after them, caught a running man under the armpit, swung him off his feet and, wheeling, cantered back to Drusus with his prey.

The man was chattering with terror. At sight of Drusus, instead of recognizing the friendly fashion of his face and armor, he cowered and shrieked.

"Have no fear," the prefect said gently. "We are friends—Romans from Legionis Asa, and others who serve Owain of North Wales. From what do you flee?"

A wail of fear rose from the city: The cries of frightened women. Shivering, the fugitive held out his hands.

"Have mercy!" he moaned.

Patiently Drusus repeated his assurances. Slowly the panic faded from the man's eyes; in its place shone incredulous joy:

"Ye come to help us?" he gasped.

Drusus nodded.

"Now tell me—all—swiftly."

"Saxons! They have crushed the Welsh armies, slain Owain, and now they ride hither to burn and slay!"

Niall's stern face paled.

"By ——!" he swore.

Drusus asked: "Did you see the Saxons?"

"Not here, but at Corinium, which they stormed three days ago. We fled here, while Owain and his host tarried at Brig Hill to stop them. Not an hour ago, the first of the survivors rode through the Fosse Gate on a spent horse, with the word that Owain had perished. Now let me go, or they will slay me!"

"Run, coward!" said Niall, contemptuously, letting him go.

The man was off down the road like an arrow.

The South Gate was open and unguarded. Those who had met and mistaken the cataphracts for Saxons had apparently spread the word that Ceawlin's men were attacking from the rear. No one challenged as they rode into the city, no one was in sight; yet in every house lights were burning as for a festival.

"Rabbits!" said Drusus. "Frightened folk crave light, and there is none brave or shrewd enough to warn them of their folly."

There seemed to be no soldiers, no sentinels, and the townsfolk had fled to their homes. But as the cavalry approached the market-place, a handful of limping, dust-covered spearmen stepped from the shadow of a great building and barred the way. At sight of the black-mailed Ravens, they uttered hoarse cries of joy.

"Owain's men!" cried their officer. "How did ye escape? Who are these with you?"

"The Sixth Ala of Cataphracts from Legionis Asa," Drusus answered for himself. "Is it true that Owain is dead?"

The officer groaned.

"God help us, yes! We are new-come from the battle. Weary, beaten men that we be, we alone dare resist the Saxons, who are doubtless riding hither even now. You will help us, Roman?"

"If help will avail. But are there no soldiers stationed here—no garrison?"

"Knew ye not," the Welshman answered, "that Aquæ Sulis is a mere pleasure spot for wealthy Britons who have lost the courage of their fathers? A few miscalled troops there are, but most of them are hiding in closets or under beds. A handful guard the Fosse Gate, under Gwydion, proprietor of the baths."

"And the citizens—will none of them man the walls?"

"They skulk in the cellars, save those too frightened to hide, who flock like sheep to the old temple."

"Send your men to close the South Gate," Drusus ordered, "and guide me to the Fosse Gate and this Gwydion of whom you speak."

They rode behind him till they came to the great Roman baths, almost as large as those of Bellerium, and the ancient temple of Sul-Minerva, now used both as a Christian church and as a monastic school.

As they reached the archway connecting the two buildings, a sound fraught with fear and agony filled the air: The voices of a multitude crying upon God and the saints for help.

Beneath the double colonnade of the baths thronged the woful citizens. They packed the stone steps of the temple, a sea of heads that extended across the street, far as the eye could see, and under the shadows of the temple court. Unused to war, city-nurtured, they sought the unavailing comfort of stone walls.

In the archway the cavalry came to an enforced halt. The packed mass of bodies permitted no passage. Drusus was compelled to order his troopers to await him there.

"Show me the way to the gate," he said to the guide, "and do you announce to the people that we are come to help them."

"You can get through there," replied the Welshman, pointing east along the cross street south of the baths, "and by the old Armorers' Street north to the Fosse Gate."

In the side streets there were no signs of life, save a few heads that were hastily withdrawn from lighted windows as Drusus rode past. The city of Aquæ Sulis, which he had imagined a strong and glorious metropolis, was nothing but a decayed watering-place, the abode of rich refugees and the parasites who catered to them.

He reached the long street that ran from the northwestward Julian Gate to the northern Fosse Gate, when he was once more obliged to strike back into the muddy byways.

Down the Fosse Road poured a continuous stream of refugees, exhausted, and overloaded with their household goods, but struggling on with the strength of despair. At the gate itself less than three-score men stood guard, an ill-assorted company, variously equipped and poorly armed. Sullen and frightened, they seemed both unwilling to run and unable to hold their ground.

The officer in command was a huge fellow in the late thirties, strong but running to fat. He was clad in rich Roman armor of an antique fashion, and his long, bushy hair, red as that of Drusus, streamed from beneath his helmet. He stared at Drusus suspiciously, but almost embraced him when the prefect explained his errand.

"In the name of heaven, help me hold the gate!" he implored. "Bring up your men by the side streets and post them on the bridge yonder. My fellows will not stand unless reënforced!"

"Close the gates, then," ordered Drusus, "even if you have to shut out the last of the fugitives to save the rest."

The man groaned.

"The gates can not be shut," he answered. "The rusty pivots snapped in the sockets when we tried to close them."

"Are the wall-engines commanding the bridge ready to loose?" demanded the prefect. "My troopers are all artillerymen, at need."

"Engines?" gasped the other. "Man, the catapults have not been used for generations. Their sinew has rotted—the frames are worm-eaten. Moreover—" there were tears in his voice—"there are three wide breaches crumbled in the walls, and not enough food for a week's siege."

"Yet you stand here at the gate?" commented Drusus, impressed with the man's stubborn courage. "Who are you?"

"I am Gwydion of the baths," replied the defender of the gate. "My ancestors were rubbers there, as was I, till last month. The late owner sold out to me at a great bargain and fled to Brittany.

"Aquæ Sulis—I can not abandon Aquæ, the glory of Britain, the joy of proconsuls and emperors! The daughter of Owain was here but lately, for the waters. Now she has left with her escort for Bellerium. God preserve her!"

"She arrived safely in Bellerium," said Drusus for Gwydion's comfort.

"So soon?" asked Gwydion, surprized. "The Holy Mother herself has watched over her. Hark, Prefect!"

T FAR down the road from the north came the sharp cries of men who feel the prick of steel, mingled with the shouting of those who slay. The stream of fugitives surged frantically forward, pressing against those ahead. Caught between the stone sides of the narrow gateway, the crowd jammed hopelessly, while those behind kept pushing in furious panic, trying to force a way through. The crunch of broken bones, the shrieks of strong men crushed like sheep, were echoed by distant shouts of triumph and the drumming of many hoofs.

"This city can not be held," said Drusus, speaking as to an equal and a brother-officer. "Yet many of the folk can be saved even now, with my lances to rearguard them on the way, while you hold the gate—and after while the heathen scatter to plunder and feast. Gladly would I stay and die beside you——"

"Ride on! Britain needs you and your lances, Prefect."

Deeply moved, the young patrician raised his long saber in a stately salute to the son of a slave:

"God guard you, Gwydion of the Baths, and those who stand beside you for the lives of others and the honor of your city!"

"Wheeling his horse, he shouted:

"To the West Gate, all who would escape! This city is to be evacuated at once! To the West Gate!"

The overcrowded Fosse Way was already spilling its surplus of refugees down every side street. As he spurred through the byways, Drusus repeated his cry:

"To the West Gate! To the West Gate!"

He pulled up beside the throng between the baths and the temple. As soon as they recognized his armor, the multitude broke into hysterical cheers. On the other side of the massed heads, the Bellerian lances gleamed reassuringly. It was their presence, the whispers of their purpose in the doomed city, that opened the people's ears to Drusus' commands.

"Hear me," he cried, "and obey, if ye would save your lives. You I can protect, but not your city. Go out now by the West Gate, down the Sabrinian Road. Stop not to collect your goods, nor to wait for friends, but go! March out slowly, lest you crush one another to death, as others have but now done at the Fosse Gate. I and my horsemen will form a barrier between you and the Saxon spears. Forward!"

Drusus squeezed his horse along the edge of the crowd, giving orders, and striking blows with the flat of his sword, till he had them moving steadily down the wide street toward the West Gate. A gap in the wall nearby helped speed the exodus. At last he was able to order the squadron forward, behind the priests and acolytes bearing the sacred vessels, who brought up the rear.

As the cavalry moved off, a clear, thin voice cried from the temple steps:

"Flee, cowards! Flee, lest the Saxons think there are still men in Britain. I will stay, for the honor of my people!"

With one accord the cataphracts turned their eyes to the temple porch. A boy of twelve, clad in the white tunic of the monastic school, stood by one of the Corinthian columns, one hand set cockily to his hip, the other clutching a dagger. The flickering glare of a torch gleamed on his scornful face.

Drusus rode back to the steps, dismounted, ran up them two at a time and snatched the boy up.

"Let me go!" the child shrilled, lunging frantically with his dagger.

Gently Drusus disarmed him, bore him wriggling to his horse and mounted, holding his captive before him.

"Let me go!" the boy cried again, struggling fiercely. "I will not ride with a coward!"

"What is your name, cockerel?" asked the prefect.

"Erbin—but what is that to you, Timid One?"

Drusus smiled bitterly. The boy's rebuke brought to his mind the pride in which he had ridden out from Legionis Asa to join Owain and save Britain. Now Owain's death, the sudden, complete disaster to the British arms, the flight from the doomed city of Aquæ—it was a ghastly end to his dreams.

Out of the low valley where the city nestled, rode the silent horsemen, in the rear of three thousand homeless refugees, dim ghosts of folk in the darkening night. Behind them rose the shouts of the triumphant Saxons, the screams of those whom the spears had overtaken at the Fosse Gate, the sounds of riot, loot and slaughter. Looking back, Drusus saw flames rising above the high-built walls.

"Little Erbin," he said gently. "Can a hundred men hold a defenceless city against thousands? There are no engines on the walls, the gates will not close, and few townsmen dare to face steel."

He felt a strange impulse to justify himself in the eyes of this child, who would have stayed, alone, to face the heathen hordes.

"Could ye not die?" Erbin retorted contemptuously.

"Britain has need of fighting men, not corpses. Now that Owain of North Wales will never lift sword again, we who still are not afraid to fight must not throw our lives away foolishly. Have patience; the time will come when you will better understand a soldier's duty."

Erbin pondered these words with the solemn earnestness of childhood.

"Perhaps," he ventured at last, brightening, "the Saxons may pursue us!"

Drusus laughed.

"If so, you shall see whether we are cowards."

MORNING shone bright on the woful refugees as they were ferried, boatload by boatload, across the broad estuary of the Severn. Once on the Welsh side, the immediate peril was over. They landed at the mouth of the Avon, where the Severn is joined by the Usk. Leaving the fugitives to rest, or follow after by road or water, Drusus pressed on with his own force up the left bank of the Usk. A few miles up that stream lay the ancient Roman fortress of Caerleon, now the capital of South Wales.

At the sight of his lances, the gates were closed and the ramparts lined with spears. A blue-coated chieftain challenged from the battlements:

"Who are ye, strangers, and why do ye come in arms to the land of Mynwy?"

"Romans!" answered the prefect curtly, his Latin pride roused at being thus halted at the gates of what had once been an imperial fortress.

The frown of the challenger changed to a smile of welcome:

"From Legionis Asa, to fight by the side of Owain? You come in good time, for though King Farimael has already set out for Glevum, the gathering-place appointed by Owain, yet Brochwel, Prince of Powys, is even now in Caerleon, soon to march forth to join his forces with those of the assembled kings. You can rest with us tonight, and march with us tomorrow."

"Too late," answered Drusus sadly. "Like us, you have tarried too long. The victorious Saxons hold revel even now in Aquæ Sulis—and Owain is dead."

The chieftain turned pale.

"Dead!" he cried. "Owain dead? The Shield of Wales, the Lion of Rhegged? O wo! Wo to the tribes of Cambria! Wo to the kindly roofs of Britain!"

"Owain's warriors thank you," spoke the deep voice of Niall of the Sword, "for the first keening over their slain king."

Mastering his grief, the Welsh chieftain commanded the gates to be opened, and himself came down to welcome the newcomers to Caerleon on Usk.

"Proud will Prince Brochwel be to greet you, Roman and Raven alike! I, Manogan of the Guard, will conduct you to his presence. But tell me, have you heard how it fared with Farimael, our king, in that lost battle?"

Drusus shook his head.

"There are fugitives from Aquæ down the river in need of food and shelter. Among them are some who fled from the battle. They will know."

Under Manogan's guidance, they rode in through the gate of Caerleon. Scarcely had they passed the walls when a troop of horse came down the principal street, the escort of a keen-eyed, middle-aged warrior whose golden circlet proclaimed his royal rank.

Both bodies of riders reined in, the wearer of the crown scanning the newcomers attentively. Suddenly he sprang from his horse, ran toward Drusus, and snatched the boy Erbin from the prefect's arms.

"My son!" he cried. "My little son!"

CHAPTER XI

BURIED TREASURE

"HONEST men built these walls," said Niall of the Sword as with Drusus and Brochwel he inspected the ancient but unshaken fortifications of Caerleon.

"Romans," answered the Prince of Powys tersely.

"But the Saxon walls are better," the prefect said, "for they are built not of stones but of men."

Silence fell on the three as they stood, muffled in their cloaks against the driving rain, looking out across the eastern battlements of Caerleon.

"Ah, those stubborn Saxon shield walls!" sighed Brochwel. "For this is the Saxons' strength: The commonest churl among them is armed and armored like a chief, while we, to keep one mailed horseman in the field, must tax the toil of ten. Their foot are many, our horse are few. Now that Arthur and Owain ride no more, who will lift a lance for Britain?"

"Drusus!" Niall acclaimed. "His riders burst through the Saxon shield wall like bulls through a fence of straw."

"But they are only a handful," answered Brochwel. "Surely your Senate will send an army, Prefect?"

Drusus shook his head sadly.

"Owain's defeat will but harden their hearts and make them cling more closely to the shelter of their own walls. We must fight on with what weapons God has given us. Perhaps he will vouchsafe a miracle."

He turned and strode along the flagged platform, identical in every detail with those of his own Castellum Maris, save that the catapults emplaced upon it were badly out of repair.

"Here is a mighty archer!" Niall placed his hand affectionately on the slide of a huge crossbow-like *tormenta*. "I have seen one like him shoot from the top of a cliff an arrow as big as a tree, that could stave in the side of a ship or spit seven Saxons one behind the other, shields, armor and all!"

Brochwel of Powys was deeply impressed; so was his little son Erbin, who had come up on bare and silent feet.

"Can this do anything like that?" the prince asked Drusus, who was feeling the working parts of the great war engine with practised fingers.

"If repaired, yes."

"What do you need—timber, iron, rawhide? We have those in abundance."

"The one thing most needful," said Drusus, pulling a few rotten, ill-smelling shreds from the heart of the frame, "is mule-gut."

"I will have a mule slaughtered at once," Brochwel said, but the Prefect shook his head.

"It would take the gut from a whole herd," he declared, "and then it must be skilfully treated before it can be twisted into the springs that give the engine its power. It is an old jest in Legionis that every mule that dies there has its guts embalmed and entombed in the arsenal. I think, however, we can manage to get some of the catapults into working order."

"Father," asked Erbin abruptly, "if I find a catapult that will work, can I have it for my own?"

"Go to, baby! Do not hinder the counsels of men! Get thee hence. Bid old Mathonwy make thee a bow and arrows."

"Stay!" ordered Drusus as the youngster turned to go. "Where could you find a catapult that would work? There is none such upon all the walls."

"It isn't on the walls," Erbin said, "and it is a little one—just the right size for me."

"Some Roman child's plaything he's found," said Niall indifferently.

But Drusus was interested.

"Would you like me to show you how it works?" he asked the boy. "Let us go and see it together."

They all went down from the wall by the nearest ramp and crossed the interior of the fortress-city, now crammed with refugees from fallen Aquæ and deserted Glevum. The barracks had become overflowing tenements; worst crowded of all was the old military hospital. As they were passing that Nicator hailed them from the doorway, a reddened lancet in his hand.

"Set some more of these cursed idlers to clearing out the drains!" he called out to them. "The sewage is backing up. We shall have a pestilence as soon as the sun comes out!"

He darted back into the building with the abruptness of an overworked man.

"I never dreamed that dandy was a physician," Drusus said to Niall.

"Nor that a traitor would have the courage to enter that fever-trap—which is more than I could do," answered the Irishman.

At the end of a narrow alley between long rows of ordnance storehouses and buttressed granaries, Erbin pointed to where a sturdy oak was growing out of the side of a stone and rubble vault.

"Here!" cried the boy. "Climb through the hole, and you will see!"

Drusus looked and laughed. The door of the vault had been bricked up; the hole burst by the growing tree left a space barely large enough for a child to wriggle through. Doffing his helmet, the Prefect stooped and thrust in his head.

Long after his eyes had become accustomed to the gloom within, Drusus crouched there, silent and motionless, unheeding either his comrades' questions or the cold drippings that ran down under his armor. When at last he withdrew, his face was as one who has seen a vision.

"God has indeed vouchsafed a miracle," he said reverently.

"What is it? What saw you in there?" they asked.

"The salvation of Britain—the Saxon shield walls crumbling in red ruin and their galleys fleeing like frightened gulls across the eastern ocean. Erbin, as you hate the heathen, keep silence as to what you have found. Prince and captain, let us post a guard of the trustiest men about this vault and then—to council."

* * *

"THIS, then, is determined," Drusus summed up. "First, our new weapon and method of warfare must be kept close hid, that the shock of surprize may double the weight of the blow. Therefore we must stand on the defensive during the coming winter. Prince, have you men enough to hold Caerleon?"

"Plenty, if you can spare me enough of yours to repair and work the great stone-throwers."

"I can spare you all but ten."

"You dare try to return to Legionis with but ten spears at your back?" exclaimed Brochwel. "Remember, the Saxons bar the Cornish road."

"But not the Severn Sea. Niall and I shall embark with our men, mounts and supplies on the Isca, a round-ship from Glevum, now anchored in the Usk. We shall land at St. Ia's Bay, whence it is but a short march to Castellum Maris. Look for us again in the spring."

"You feel sure now that your Senate will not refuse you?" asked Brochwel.

"Yes, because I shall no longer ask them for legions. After Owain's defeat and death, many might well deem it madness for a corner of Britain to try to reconquer all the south and east. But now all I ask is fifteen hundred lances and five hundred artillerymen. With them we shall wage a new warfare, such as never before was seen."

"And never would have been, had not my boy, whom you saved, gone hunting for buried treasure."

"And found it," concluded Niall.

CHAPTER XII

OUT OF THE GRAVE

THEIR cloaks whitened and their armor rusted by salt spray, thirteen horsemen crossed the sands to the foot of the ramp leading up to Castellum Maris. The challenge from the wall changed to a yell of mortal terror, and the long arm of a balista creaked back to the shriek of a windlass.

Drusus felt a terrible fear. Had the garrison gone over to Ventidius, or had his soldiers been replaced by hired ruffians.?

He heard the stone grate on the balista's pan. One second more and the trigger would be knocked out with the maul of the balistarius, and the great boulder would hurtle down on him and his followers.

Only an instant he paused to shout through cupped hands:

"It is I, Drusus!"

Then he drove the spurs home and galloped up the ramp. The cataphracts tore after him, bringing Niall and Nicator with them. Fearfully they looked up and behind, fully expecting to see the great stone whirl upward in an arc, to descend upon the spot they had just quitted. Set as that particular engine was to sweep the base of the ramp and beyond, they knew it could not reach them at shorter range.

But the stone was never launched. Instead, the brazen gates, invisible from the lower ramp, clanged open, and an officer ran forth to greet them at the turn, hands outstretched and eyes joyful.

"Drusus! Is it you in the flesh?"

Hastator, in his glad astonishment, forgot to salute.

"Why not?" laughed the prefect, leaning from the saddle to grasp his legate's hand. "Try me with a goat steak!"

"But they said you were killed with all your men."

"Who said that?"

"The fugitives from Aquæ Sulis. Three hundred of them reached here two weeks ago. They reported you had ridden into the city just before the Saxons stormed it. One, a merchant who knew you had red hair, declared he had seen you fall. Glad am I to see you safe, though so few of our good lads are with you."

"The rest are safe in Caerleon," Drusus answered. "We lost only four of our own and one of the Ravens. But where is he who said he saw me slain?"

"In Bellerium. He told how he beheld a Saxon cleave the skull of a tall, red-headed man in Roman armor, at the Fosse Gate."

"Ah!" said Drusus with a flash of understanding. "That would be Gwydion of the Baths. Many live because he died."

Hastator was not listening; he was staring at him who rode behind the prefect.

"Nicator!" he gasped. "'Twas thought you had fallen from the cliffs to your death in the sea! Little wonder that the crew of No. 4 balista would have loosed upon you for a troop of ghosts come to do us harm. We shall hear rare tales after mess."

"First let us hear the news from the city," said the prefect.

They had dismounted at headquarters and entered the familiar mess room, where the other officers who had remained behind gave him a joyous welcome.

"The best is that you may sin as you please," said a sardonic old centurion, "after the numberless masses that have been said for your soul."

"How eloquent was the eulogy delivered by Ventidius," a young cavalry subaltern put in, "and how pitiful the grief of your aunt and cousin. The Princess Gwenlian and her brother ——"

"The prince is here, too, then?" Niall interrupted.

"Prince Meriaduc arrived with a small escort of Ravens a few days ahead of the refugees," the subaltern informed them. "He had been very ill at Aquæ Sulis, it was reported, and was still far from well. But Aquæ was not considered safe, and as soon as he could travel, he set out for Legionis Asa."

Niall thought he understood: For greater security on the road, Gwenlian had traveled in the uniform of a young officer. Hearing on her arrival that she was already in Bellerium, a guest in the home of the prefect of the Damnonian March, and not knowing what that might portend, she had decided to be Meriaduc until she found out what the imposter was up to.

"How fare the childred of Owain?" Niall asked.

Hastator replied:

"Well; well enough."

"'Well enough' is no answer, soldier," Niall said, returning a flash of iron pride for the veiled scorn he detected in the other's voice.

Hastator addressed his further reply more to Drusus than to the Raven.

"The Princess Gwenlian," he said, "is to marry Ventidius tonight."

"Ventidius!" Niall roared. "Tonight! Name of ——, give me my horse!"

Drusus seized the excited Irishman by the shoulder and restrained him. Before the prefect could speak, Capito, the decurion who had ridden with him to Caerleon, snatched out his sword and flung it clattering on the table.

"By Saint Mark!" he swore. "Never will I sheathe this blade till it rends that traitor's heart in two!"

"Traitor!" cried twenty astounded voices.

"Aye, traitor he is!" answered Capito. "Who forbade our Drusus to raise an army for the defense of Britain? Who sent his messenger to warn the Saxons of our march, and bid them destroy us in the Cornish hills? Who but the traitor—Ventidius!"

All turned their faces to Drusus, who did not respond at once.

"Capito speaks truth," he said at last.

The words fell slowly, as if forced from his pallid lips.

"Say nothing of this, any of you, till I give the word. Nay, Niall, be silent! I swear to you that your princess shall not give herself to that renegade. Hastator, will you assemble the garrison at once? I have not the authority to issue orders here till the Senate gives me command again, but I think none will disobey me."

"I have the authority," Hastator answered, "and I will crucify the man who dares hold back when Drusus speaks."

Within the quarter of an hour, the entire garrison was drawn up on the parade ground without the walls, tha cataphracts mounted, and all, both horse and foot, in full armor. When Drusus appeared, every weapon flashed high in the Roman military salute, every voice was lifted in a paean of welcome:

"Hail, Drusus! Drusus of the Wall! Hail, Hail, Hail!"

In their joy at their leader's return, they had unconsciously given him the "thrice hail" reserved by immemorial custom for a conquering general. But no answering smile told them their prefect had so much as noticed. He held up his hand for silence; his face was stern and gray.

"Fellow soldiers," he addressed them, "today I, the Prefect of the March, ride into Legionis Asa as a rebel, sword in hand. I hope I need shed no drop of loyal Bellerian blood, but I shall enter the city of my fathers as Caesar entered Rome, with spears to enforce my word. For treason had driven us, as it drove Caesar, to cross the Rubicon."

He paused. In breathless silence the steel-clad lines waited for his next words.

"Men of Legionis, a traitor has conspired to deliver Roman soldiers to the Saxon foe, the same traitor who influenced the Senate to rebuff King Owain's embassy, plotted with the public enemy to deliver your own comrades into a Saxon ambush. Owain is dead, but I live, to bring the just vengence of God upon that traitor—Ventidius."

A deep gasp, like the sigh of a storm wind, rose from five hundred throats. The eyes of all, burning with silent rage, gazed into the eyes of Drusus. Turning to the white-faced Nicator, he commanded:

"I call on you, Nicator, to confirm my words!"

Nicator shrank from the deadly condemnation in the eyes of the soldiers; but his whole hope was in Drusus. With all the courage he could muster, he stammered out the vile tale; and he did not spare himself.

When he finished, there was a momentary silence, which was shattered by a roar of fury, and the ranks dissolved into a raging mob. With brandished swords and javelins, the soldiers rushed at Nicator, shouting:

"Kill him! Tear him in pieces! The tool of Ventidius! Kill him! Kill him."

Wheeling his horse between the oncoming mob and their prey, Drusus signed to his trumpeter, who blew a single blast. The soldiers wavered, and Drusus seized the moment.

"Harm him not, if ye love me!" he commanded. "I have given Nicator safe-conduct to the city, where he shall stand his trial."

They stood irresolute, eyes still blazing. The prefect continued:

"This same Nicator, whom ye would slay outright, wiped out his debt to me by saving my life in the fight on the Cornish sands. But for him, I should not be with you now. Without fear, or thought of self, he entered the fever-infested military hospital of Caerleon and treated the patients, saving the lives of many. What say ye now?"

Half shamed, half bewildered, they wavered, then fell back again into line.

"His evidence," Drusus went on, "will condemn Ventidius thrice over. But I am done pleading before a Senate owned by the traitor. Not till your faithful swords argue my case against Ventidius will I enter the court."

"Hail, Drusus, hail!" they responded.

"I ride now to Bellerium. All of you go with me, save the Fourth Maniple and the engineers, who must stay to guard the wall under Tiburcus. Capito commands the cataphracts, Hastator the Third Maniple. To horse, the Sixth Ala! Forward, the Fortuna Triumphans! Show me how close Roman infantry can follow horsemen!"

MOUNTED on the swiftest horse in Castellum Maris, Drusus sped down the Bellerium road, Niall at his side, five score cataphracts pounding at their heels. Behind them, in the long, road-devouring pace of the legion, swung the Third Maniple. Each soldier carried only his weapons and his leather canteen full of thin wine. It was an hour past noon and twenty-five miles to be covered by nightfall.

It was already dusk when Drusus urged his flagging mount through the Arch of Victory. The forum, lighted by rows of torches along the front of every building, was packed with a throng extending from the basilica steps almost to the senate house. The column façade of the great church was ablaze with torchlight, reflected from the breastpates of the cordon of police drawn up on the portico. Within, the voices of the choir-boys, the deeper monotone of chanting priests, was borne out upon the incense-laden air.

Fear gripped the prefect's heart. He recognized the sonorous words of the ancient Latin chant, knew that a few moments more would see Gwenlian, the lovely daughter of dead Owain, bound forever to the hideous Ventidius. Driving home his spurs, Drusus charged into the forum as if at a Saxon shieldwall.

An officer of police, at the top of the basilica steps, gasped at the sight of Drusus, and pointed toward him a rigid finger. His men looked, their faces grew livid, their eyes fixed in staring horror.

The crowd, anxious to enjoy this new spectacle, turned, then gasped at what they saw.

Down toward them bounded a huge horse, backed by a tall rider in faded cloak and rusted mail. Beneath the raised visor of his helmet his eyes glared with unearthly fury. Awed and frightened, the crowd drew back to yield him room. They breathed the rider's name in running whispers, instinct with the horror of living men for the ghosts of the dead.

"Drusus!" "Drusus!" "Drusus!"

Without a word, without swerving or slackening, Drusus rode in full career through the lane that opened before him. Reining in till the roan pawed the air at the foot of the basilica steps, he leaped from the saddle and took the stone stairs two at a time. Even the police backed away from him, crossing themselves before one who seemed to have risen from the tomb.

Within, the side aisles of the great basilica formed a dark frame for a glittering center. Packed with the city poor, the space beneath the pillared galleries on either hand formed a strange contrast to the silken throng of nobles, senators and dark-eyed Italian ladies in the nave. The reek of fish, of sweaty bodies, mingled with the most delicate scents and the heavy perfume of flowers.

Their heads bowed, the congregation saw not him who ran down the aisle, till the intoned prayer was over. Then, as they looked up and beheld him, there descended upon the House of God a silence fraught with breathlessness.

Drusus had no eye for the people or their fear. His burning glance was fixed on a group before the altar, under the high-vaulted apse. Grimly he strode toward them, heeding not the blanched faces of the tonsured priests, nor the rigid figure of the old bishop, resplendent in embroidered chasuble over a dalmatic crusted with gold.

He knew not that the outstretched hand of the ecclesiast quivered as it reached for the ring, heard not the ripple of terror pass like an icy breath over the congregation. He saw Gwenlian in white linen, her shoulders covered with a silken scarf, standing before the altar, and looming beside her the huge back of Ventidius. Between the bethrothed pair and the congregation stood Sophonisba with Tullia and a young man in the uniform of a Welsh officer, Meriaduc, only son of Owain.

There were those who thought the young prince seemed even gentler, more girlish than his sister at the altar. He stood upright and princely, though his expressive young face wore a troubled, anxious appealingness, which he attempted to mask with a manly stoicism.

The venerable Ambrosius, Bishop of Bellerium, was the first to recover from the terror of that sudden apparition. His fear, natural as it was, yielded before his sublime confidence in his sacred office.

"In the name of the Holy Trinity," he called boldly, "I conjure you, if you be ghost of hell, go back to the fiend who sent you! But if ye be living man, then speak, Marcianus Drusus, and cease to perturb the holy sacrament of marriage!"

No sooner had the prefect's name rung out upon the startled ears of the group before the altar than they turned with one accord, to meet the blazing eyes of Drusus himself. Sophonisba shrieked. Tullia's proud, beautiful face turned white. But the graceful figure in the white linen of a bride, ran to meet him with a joyful cry, deep-throated and rich, and looked up at him with eyes which spoke unbounded relief and trust.

Drusus took the bride's hand and looked over her head at the bishop:

"I live," he answered, "by the grace of God and my good men! I live, to restore the honor of my people, and to prevent this unholy marriage!"

CHAPTER XIII

VANISHED!

VENTIDIUS, his face contorted, approached the bride who had flown from his side. Drusus flung him off.

"Touch her not!" he commanded.

"She is my betrothed wife," the politician retorted. "Let the marriage proceed!"

Ventidius was thinking swiftly. The report of the fugitives from Aquæ had deceived him as thoroughly as it had the rest of Legionis. Blamed by the army and people alike for their favorite's death, as well as for the overthrow of Owain, he had mourned louder than any to disarm suspicion.

The first outburst of execration died

down, as the prudent majority realized the danger of taking the offensive either against the politician or the heathen, now that Drusus and Owain were no more. None had suspected his treason; nor could Drusus know of the attempted ambush, since the pirates had evidently failed to find him. So thought Ventidius, and resolved to face the matter out.

The bishop stood irresolute—the service halted. Drusus asked the bride, in a voice all could hear:

"Do you love this man?"

The bride shivered and cried out, "No!" as if glad at last to speak the truth to all the world.

"Then why——"

"Why?" The young voice rang, rich and full. "I will tell you—all of you—why I promised to marry him. When I learned of my father's death, and that Drusus, too, had been slain, all my hope for the freedom of my land was destroyed. Then Ventidius came to me, avowing his sorrow at what had happened. Deep was the grief he professed at the death of Drusus, whom he had always admired, he said. He swore to me that what Drusus had attempted, he, Ventidius, would carry out.

" 'If you will be my wife,' he said, 'I will see that every man Legionis Asa can raise is sent to help North Wales against the Saxon sword. Nay,' he said, 'I will take the field myself!' This he promised on his honor; and I, to save Britain, consented. But I bargained. I said I would marry him, but would not live with him till he redeemed his promise."

"Such was my promise," broke in Ventidius boldly, "and I will carry it out. Let us have done with this folly. I demand that the service go on."

But Drusus had heard enough:

"You carry out such a promise, or any part of it?" he mocked. "You, who traffic shamelessly with the Saxon?"

He turned to the bride.

"Once he had married you, his word to you would mean nothing to him."

To the congregation:

"Citizens, you know the part this dog played in preventing the sending of an army to North Wales. You know that gallant Owain, who prayed for that army, without it, was slain in Britain's defense. But you do not know how Ventidius warned a Saxon fleet to cut off my command on its way through Damnonia; how Nicator, his go-between, was taken prisoner when we crushed the pirates on the shore, and confessed his own and his master's guilt."

He turned to the poor folk crowding the aisles:

"You who have wondered at the death rate at the quarries never dreamed that your wretched kinfolk were sold by night as slaves to the Saxons."

Growls of rage from the crowded aisles drowned his voice. When he could be heard again, he went on:

"Yet all this, and more, has Ventidius done. Whence comes the wealth with which he bribes our senators—you, Carbo; you, Egidius; you, Gregorius Ela? From secret commerce with the heathen, the very men whose spears rent the life from Owain, whose swords devastated Aquæ Sulis! Citizens, here in the holy shrine of God, by my most sacred honor and my Christian faith, I charge Ventidius with treason against the state!"

The congregation stood stupefied. Shock after shock had descended upon them. They were too overwhelmed to speak or think coherently. Ventidius skilfully seized the occasion.

"Which of you," he sneered, "will believe such a charge, from the lips of one whose acts prove him a criminal? Has he not quitted his command without leave? Has he not profaned Holy Church by entering the basilica in armor, by standing before the sacred altar unshriven, his sword still by his side? I call on you, Sulpidius Rubrex, to arrest this malefactor and bring him before the tribunal!"

Sulpidius Rubrex, Quæstor of Justice, feeling every eye on him, hesitated, plucking at his venerable beard. Never a man of action, he was too timid, too confused, to decide between charge and counter-charge.

Drawn within by the confusion, a number of the police had entered the church. One, Mucro, a surly-browed decurion, approached Drusus from behind with catlike tread. The prefect, unaware of the menace in his rear, addressed Rubrex with a confident smile:

"Arrest us both, O Quæstor, that the law may judge between us."

But Ventidius had no wish to wait till Nicator came to bear witness against him. His only hope was to outface the quæstor, have Drusus thrown in prison without sacrificing his own liberty, and introduce an assassin into the prefect's cell.

Inwardly fuming at the irresolute Rubrex, Ventidius caught the eye of Mucro, the decurion of police. He threw this officer a meaning glance, which Drusus saw, and turned quickly to find the decurion and his men at his shoulder. Mucro whipped out his sword.

But at the flash of steel, the Bishop of Bellerium spoke from beside the altar.

"Peace!" he thundered. "Sheathe your blades, or I close the gates of heaven against you!"

Ventidius shrank back; the decurion sheathed his sword. The congregation, by this time babbling and hysterical, blanched at the prelate's words. But before the holy Ambrosius could speak again, a tumult arose on the porch without.

"Owain and North Wales! Make way!" rang the voice of Niall.

Rough voices answered; then came the clang of steel.

Drusus ran down the aisle to intervene. Well he knew the penalty for shedding blood in the house of God: The unfortunate offender was denied communion, absolution and burial in holy ground.

But Niall had not been able to avoid bloodshed. In his zeal to enter and get at Ventidius, he had hurled himself against the line of police. One of them had drawn his sword, and the Irishman had struck him down. When Drusus reached the door, Niall had his back against a column and was laying about him with his broadsword. The police, handicapped by the lightness of their armor and the shortness of their blades, hovered about him in a half-circle.

Intent only on restoring order, Drusus shouldered his way through and commanded them to cease. But Ventidius, close behind, whispered seductive promises to Mucro. Now that swords were already drawn, no penalty could be inflicted on a peace officer in the discharge of his duty. Mucro crept up behind the prefect with ready weapon. Niall saw, and, thrusting over his friend's shoulder, sent his point through Mucro's throat.

An angry shout went up from the police, men carefully picked by Nicator at the instance of Ventidius. As Mucro fell, they charged in upon the two they held responsible. Drusus drew his own sword, and backed up to the column against which Niall stood.

With the skill of war-tried veterans, the two plied their long swords in cunning coöperation, one parrying as the other struck. But it was close, dangerous work. Niall and Drusus, with their longer blades, were forced to use the edge more than the point, and the edge is slower.

Out of the church poured the congregation, senators and plebians, priests and laymen. Down through the crowded forum spread the word that Drusus lived and was fighting for his life. With an angry roar the multitude surged forward and up the steps. Quickly, all but a handful of the police detached themselves from the combat and formed at the head of the steps just as the mob swept up.

At that moment the venerable form of Bishop Ambrosius appeared upon the topmost step, his arms outstretched, like Moses on the mount. His chasuble was rent from neck to waist; the crozier in his hand was broken, but his face was that of one filled with the power of Heaven. Just the sight of him quieted the mob considerably.

"Peace!" he commanded in a voice that rang above the dying shouts. "Be still, lest I call down upon you the divine anger! Would ye storm God's temple?"

The police now realized they must make an end, before the mob could escape from the Bishop's control. Three leaped in together, their points darting upward in the terrible full-arm thrust of the Roman. Drusus raised his blade; the onward rush of his nearest opponent spitted him on the prefect's point.

Niall had met his man with the edge; but before Drusus could disengage, the third was on him. Caught between the point and the pillar behind him, Drusus could only await the blow. As the short sword stabbed upward, the prefect thrust out one foot, dashed the blade aside with his greaved ankle, and drove his heel into his enemy's stomach.

A tense, slim figure in loose-hanging policeman's mail, clutching a policeman's short sword, hovered about Drusus, never striking with his weapon, but seeming ever ready. It was Meriaduc.

Wrenching his sword from the breast of his unlucky assailant, Drusus leaned back against the column, gasping for breath.

A mighty yell of acclamation went up from the crowd.

* * *

MERIADUC had been the bride, though Gwenlian now wore the garments he had graced before the altar. In the confusion, they had retired into a small chapel just in the rear of the main altar, which was well up toward the center of the church. Here they exchanged clothes, and then Meriaduc had stripped the mail and sword from an unconscious policeman in the entrance to the chapel, whither he had dragged his fainting body from the fight at the front of the church.

The mail was stained with blood, but Meriaduc had not hesitated to put it on. Gwenlian rejoiced, until she met her brother's eyes. The hot, unnatural look in them smote her. She grasped his arm and spoke his name in a low, surprized cry of apprehension:

"Meriaduc!" Then, gaining voice: "My dear Meriaduc! My dear Meriaduc, it is not necessary that you fight!"

But Meriaduc wrenched free and dashed from the chapel.

Gwenlian flung herself before the altar of the Virgin in the little chapel, and there Sophonisba and Tullia found her a few minutes later. Sophonisba hurried her charges from the church by a side entrance, quite deserted by this time. There their carriage and Gwenlian's Ravens waited for them.

On the way home Owain's daughter rode with one end of her scarf thrown across her face. Its light texture obscured but did not hide the tragedy and fear which overspread her features. She was beset by the memory of Meriaduc's bright, frenzied eyes, the tenseness of his bearing, and ridden by the premonition that she would nevermore see him alive.

Oh, why was the gay, art-gifted Meriaduc born under the necessity of being a soldier? She whose courage made her the darling of her people now trembled and all but wept in the grip of imagined terrors, and in despair of the helplessness of women.

The Bellerian ladies pretended not to notice the agitation their guest strove to hide, though Sophonisba's tender, motherly heart went out in quick, if belated, affection to the lonely, suffering girl. At last she was ready to surrender Drusus to Gwenlian and to love them both, without jealousy for Tullia or regret for her own disappointment.

Tullia, on the other hand, who had heretofore generously admired the Welsh princes for their fortitude under the whip of disaster, regarded Gwenlian's breakdown without much sympathy. With Drusus returned and all Legionis Asa roused to support her cause, Tullia thought that, in Gwenlian's place, she would have been exalted far above collapse.

When Gwenlian had arrived in Bellerium at the house of Drusus, she had found her brother, masquerading as herself, already pledged to marry Ventidius. Fearful of what Ventidius might do when he should discover the hoax, she had pleaded with Meriaduc to change back into his proper part, and let her be herself, vowing that she was ready to sacrifice all for her country.

To this Meriaduc would not consent, and the masquerade had continued. He trusted they would find a way out when the time came. In the end Gwenlian might have to marry Ventidius, but she should not so long as it could be avoided.

In the days immediately past, Sophonisba and Tullia, occupied with their own grief, and seeing that the brother and sister had much to say to each other, had withdrawn almost entirely from the society of their guests, being with them seldom, except at meals. This made the situation easier for everybody, and gave Meriaduc opportunity to instruct Gwenlian, who was compelled for once in her life to accept her brother's guidance, for better or for worse.

* * *

A TRUMPET-CALL cut through the cries of the crowd. Nearer and nearer, like rolling thunder, came the beat of hoofs on the granite pavement. With clank of scabbards and clink of mail, the Sixth Ala dashed into the forum, wheeled into line, and drew rein in front of the basilica. Capito and fifty troopers leaped from their saddles and swarmed up the steps with drawn sabers.

"Hold the portico!" commanded Drusus. "Let Ventidius be seized and cast into prison. If any resist, arrest them; but shed no blood, and lay hands on none of the police. They were Ventidius's men; now they are mine."

Ambrosius the bishop stepped forward. "Commit no sacrilege," he said sternly. "You have enough to answer for already, Drusus."

"I will answer, Most Reverend, both to

God and to the people of Bellerium; but the blood that has been spilled rests on the conscience of Ventidius, not on mine. Let none leave the church, Capito, till the traitor is apprehended!"

Sulpidius Rubrex, his senatorial robe disordered, was thrust forward by a group of scowling senators, who nudged and whispered to him. His pale weak face with fright, the Quæstor of Justice could find no word to say, and a bolder spoke for him: Ausonius, Quæstor of the Treasury. Hawk-beaked, dominant as some ancient Scipio, he faced the prefect with blazing eyes, and demanded:

"By what authority do you, an officer on foreign service, lead armed troops into the city? Do you not know that such an act proclaims you rebel and traitor? Has ambition made you mad?"

Drusus ignored him.

"Bring me Nicator," he ordered.

From the double rank of cataphracts now guarding the portico Nicator emerged, trembling but determined. The prefect laid a hand on his shoulder and drew him toward and up the steps. On the topmost level Drusus turned half about, so that both he and Nicator could be seen by the senators and congregation as well as by the multitude in the forum.

"Speak!" he commanded.

Nicator told of the treason of Ventidius. Painting the politicians' dealings with the Saxons in the black colors that best describe them, he was, in his new-found honor, great enough to spare himself no jot of his own infamy.

Then Drusus spoke. To Nicator's evidence he added what he had learned within the church: That Ventidius, not content with attempted murder of Bellerium troops, had plotted to marry the daughter of the king he had betrayed, to make himself heir to the crown of North Wales.

"And for this," he concluded, "to bring the traitor to a justice which the Senate might help him to escape, that I might bring this people to the defense of their hard-pressed brethren of Wales and crush the heathen forever, I have taken the only way. I have broken the law, invaded the city with troops. And as I have begun, so will I continue. Until Legionis has punished Ventidius and taken the field against the Saxons, I proclaim martial law."

The cheers that answered him proved beyond question that he had the people with him. The uproar, prolonged for many minutes, filled the darkening square with tumultuous echoes.

"Drusus!" they shouted, as with one voice. "Drusus! Long live Drusus, King of Legionis Asa!"

It was long before he could make himself heard.

"King I will not be," he proclaimed when the noise had died down; "but for your sake I will wield all the power of a king. It is best that none take the name of monarch in Legionis, nor bequeath to his children a dangerous title."

"Be dictator, then!" a soldier shouted.

A thousand voices took up the cry:

"Dictator! Be dictator! Drusus!"

"So be it," Drusus answered.

Turning to the cowed aristocrats in the portico: "What say ye?" he asked with a gleam in his eye that quelled opposition. "I see here the faces of more than half our senators. Will any vote against the motion of the people?"

None for a long minute; then Sulpidius Rubrex, seeing which way lay safety, declared pompously:

"In the name of the Senate and the people of Legionis Asa, I proclaim you, Marcianus Drusus, Dictator without term!"

Capito came forth from the church and saluted:

"Sir," he reported gravely, "Ventidius has vanished!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOMECOMING

"TAKE a score of men and search the city for him!" commanded Drusus. "Nicator knows the traitor's haunts; he will accompany you with some of his police."

"Nicator, yes, but none of his cursed catchpolls!" answered Capito. "Couple not the dogs and wolves together, Lord Dictator. The troopers hate them worse than they do the heathen, and as for the people—hark!"

"Down with the police!" a shrill voice shouted from the crowd, and the whole forum echoed the cry; "Down with the hired assassins—the oppressors of the poor!"

"You are right. We must patrol the city with the cataphracts until the legionaries get here. Order all the police to assemble at the Hall of Justice. To your homes, all of you!" Drusus called out in a voice that rang out over the instantly hushed forum.

The multitude dispersed, the more willingly because they felt the excitement was all over. Leaving the basilica, Drusus took formal possession of the Hall of Justice. By his orders every policeman, as he arrived there—and not a few were devoutly thankful to reach its shelter alive—surrendered his sword and stave. The dictator then addressed the assembled sullen and apprehensive force in the inner courtyard.

"Ventidius is a fugitive from justice," he concluded. "The ax is already sharp for his neck. None of you will ever again receive gifts or punishment from him. Ye who are spies, go find Ventidius. Five hundred silver *solidi* to whomever brings him, dead or alive. You others remain here till further orders."

As Drusus left the courtyard, he heard the tramp of infantry and the rattle of lowered spear-butts in the street outside. Hastator entered, covered with sweat and dust.

"Not a man fell out," he reported proudly.

"Well marched, Centurion. Let the men bivouac in the forum, until— Hark! What is that?"

A mounted orderly clattered up to the Hall of Justice, tumbled from his horse, and rushed in, crying:

"Ventidius is trapped in his own house. It is on fire, and the crowd is getting beyond control!"

"No rest yet," said Drusus to Hastator. "Let this man guide you. Make haste and clear the way for the fire-fighters."

Returning to the courtyard, he shouted: "To the engines!"

The effect on the sullen crowd of disarmed policemen was magical. As in all Roman cities, their duties were twofold. Throwing off their corselets, but still wearing their metal helmets, they pulled open the wide doors in the basement of the hall and dragged out apparatus patterned on that of classic Rome, but larger and more powerful, as was necessary in a city where most upper stories were built of wood.

As Drusus, mounted on a fresh horse, started in the wake of the stiffly-riding infantry, an engine-company shot out of the courtyard on the run, dragging their wooden hand-pump at the end of a long rope. After them clattered two more engines and light carts laden with buckets, axes and Roman ladders. Up the long slope they raced toward the scarlet glow that spread against the sky.

Soon they overtook and passed the legionaries, swinging along at their unvaried pace: None the quicker for the firemen's gibes, none the slower for the twenty-five miles they had marched since noon. In a short time it was the legionaries who overtook and passed the firemen, fuming helplessly on the edge of a dense-packed throng which a handful of cataphracts were vainly trying to push back with the shoulders of their weary charges.

Straight into the crowd, still with the same machine-like stride, the silent, dusty column thrust itself like a spear. A wave of the centurion's sword-arm: The maniple split into wheeling lines that folded the mob back into the side streets and penned them there.

Into the space thus opened the firemen rushed, took up their positions as close as they could endure, and brought their crude engines to bear upon the blazing house of Ventidius.

"Are you sure Ventidius is in there?" demanded Drusus as Capito rode up to him.

"So men say. The word that he had fled to his house brought half the city to besiege it. We found them hammering on the doors and wrenching at the window gratings. Even as I rode up, flames burst out through the broken panes. I sent for engines at once."

But they had come too late. The ornate walls were wrapped in waves of fire. The interior was a roaring furnace.

A warning cry from the decurion in command brought the firemen scurrying back, dragging their useless pumps and ladders. Snapping with sharp reports, the roof-beams, half consumed and straining under the massive concrete roof, gave way suddenly. Flames, fire-brands and sparks spouted to the heavens. The walls toppled, swayed, and crashed thunderously down.

"So may he roast forever!" shouted a voice in the crowd.

TO BE CONTINUED

To Beat the Band

By

Fairfax Downey

Author of "The Trophy of the 4th Gun Section."

FIRE Chief James Turberry was beginning to feel more every minute like one of the bursts of flame he was so fond of fighting to a finish. A sensation of being about to be uncomfortably extinguished overwhelmed him as he talked. Hence, although it was cool inside the log cabin headquarters of the Old-Timers' Club of MacGreggortown, Canada, the chief was far from that. Irritation glowed on his broad, ruddy features and wrinkles of indignation rippled up his brow until they were lost in the expanse of his sunburned bald pate.

The chief held his favorite position, the center of the stage, and he was launched on his favorite topic, pioneering days, but his style was being afflicted with a bad case of cramps. The cause of it all was the very deprecatory and skeptical air of the lanky man in a gorgeous uniform of white flannel and gold lace who was part of the circle of listeners. He had the I-can-tell-a-much-better-one-than-that attitude and he appeared to be rearing to go.

At length the chief ended his yarn lamely. Swayed by the boredom of the white-clad individual, the group broke precedent and cursed the chief's pioneer stuff with faint praise. Then President Bill Timmons rose.

"Seems we ought to hear from our guest from th' States," he suggested. "Band leader Orlando Chilton from th' neighborin' town of Waverly 'cross th' line is a stranger to most of us but may have done some pioneerin' on his own, in his day."

The gaunt person in the fancy white uniform needed no urging. He uprose with alacrity, placed his right hand in the bosom of his tunic and cleared his throat. But Chief Turberry jealously interposed:

"Lemme remind th' Chair that first-hand experience is th' rule in this here club. Pioneerin' in th' States run out after '49 or thereabouts and th' gent in th' white rig could not have seen th' light of day until some years later. I object to secund-hand stuff."

"And I object to the statements of the stout old party," retorted Leader Chilton. "I would never impose on this distinguished company a tale of any questionable or used adventures or relate any early-day experience that was not distinctly personal."

"Hear, hear! Right you are!" chorused the club. "Spin your yarn."

"If it's anything like his band music—" the fire chief muttered; but he was quickly shushed.

Band Leader Chilton warmed to his narrative. In five minutes he had his audience spellbound by his sonorous delivery and dramatic gestures. The old-timers hung on his every word as he approached his climax.

"Baffled by me when I produced the papers at the old homestead, this villain did not acknowledge defeat. He had one more string to his bow," the narrator declaimed. "That night when all our little frontier town slept, the hound sneaked back to the old homestead and stole the gal away. It was midnight when I had word of the dastardly deed. Comprehending his base designs, I mounted my horse and galloped at breakneck speed to the old saw mill.

"What a sight met my eyes! There was the gal, bound to a log, slowly being dragged toward the murderous teeth of the great buzz saw. It was but the work of an instant for me to rush to the machinery, throw a lever and save the gal just in the nick of time! As for her abductor, I shot him down like the dog he was!"

There was a tribute of breathless silence. Bowing to right and left, Band Leader Chilton sat down.

"Say, you faker!" Chief Turberry roared. "That never happened to you. I seen all that once in a play!"

"No doubt, no doubt," the bandsman answered calmly. "That's where they got the play from."

The cabin resounded with the applause of the old-timers and the choleric protests of the fire chief. Never had such a tale been told there. Rising, Leader Chilton obtained recognition again.

"If you require confirmation," he offered, "let me refer you to Mr. Sniffen here, piccolo player in my band, who knew some of the parties concerned in after years."

At a covert kick from his leader, Sniffen, a wizened little man, gulped and stammered—

"True, every word of it."

"And now if there are no more old-timers to be heard from," President Timmons began.

A debilitated old Indian in greasy buckskin stood up on a box on the outer edge of the circle and began rapidly to recite—

"Fondly looked at Laughing Water,
And made answer very gravely,
"Yes, if Minnehaha wishes;
Let your heart speak, Minne ——"

The recitation ended abruptly as the old-timers drowned it in a howl and pushed the Indian outdoors. One man explained to the Americans:

"That's Chief Charley Horse, an old soak of an Indian that's been hangin' round here for years. Guided a tenderfoot once that give him a drink ev'ry time th' Injun learned and said some of that pome. Charley keeps on sayin' it, hopin' for th' same result."

"If there are no more old-timers to be heard from," President Timmons had begun again, when Chief Turberry interrupted.

"I ain't to be heard from," he growled. "Deeds not words. I'm goin' to send across to my house for a fryin' pan and some flour an' stuff. Get a fire goin' here. I'm goin' to challenge this gent in th' white rig from th' States which is th' older old-timer. I'm goin' to challenge him to a flapjack tossin' contest!"

The grave look of Band Leader Chilton seemed to grow graver and his tall figure to droop slightly for a moment. But he made a grand gesture of acceptance. Soon the fire was crackling and the materials at hand.

"Proceed," the gaunt American ordered. "Though I am the challenged party, you have chosen the weapons. It is at least my privilege to elect to toss last and to decline to compete if you fail in this simple old pioneering rite."

Chief Turberry mixed a masterly batter and proceeded to cook it to a turn. Then he tossed, higher and higher. The flapjack fairly soared. Finally he fixed his eye on the roof and prepared for a supreme effort. Up flew the flapjack; then dropped like a plummet. A rafter deflected it and before it could be avoided it had landed with a resounding slap on the bald sunburned pate of Fire Chief Turberry. With a howl, he tore the cake from his head and fled.

Triumphantly rejoining his band in the nearby park, Leader Chilton raised his baton for a last number. Little Sniffen whispered up from his side:

"Say, I stuck by you in there when you pulled that stuff about th' melerdrammer you used to play in an' pretended like it really happened. Now ain't you goin' to let me quit this —— piccolo an' play th' tuba?"

"Soon, Sniffen, when you're a trifle more practiced," the leader soothed. Then he maliciously caused his band to strike up, "O Canada," during which Fire Chief Turberry was forced to stand uncovered with a bald and burning dome exposed to the sun.

IF THERE was anything in which Fire Chief James Turberry took more pride than in his pioneer days, it was his official position as a fighter of flames. He held sway over one of the few motorized fire departments outside of the large cities of the province; in fact, the only modern apparatus for miles in that section.

Now the chief sat in the fire house and gazed fondly at the polished nickel side of the engine. Its rounded surface gave back the chief's reflection broader, ruddier and more pompous than it received.

"Cheerio, Chief," the chief greeted his own reflection in the engine. It was his habit to converse with himself thus when he was certain no one was near. "Cheerio. I'm afeered that long tall glass of milk from the States was a better liar'n you t'other day. Up to then, you was a better liar'n all th' rest of 'em. But you've fixed him now. You've fixed him an' his barbecue today."

The chief chuckled and grinned broadly and his reflection grinned back at him even more broadly.

"Big barbecue in Waverly today—benefit of th' Orlando Chilton Band. An' they thought they was goin' to sneak some hootch over th' line to put some zip in it an' make ev'rybody loosen up with subscripshuns. Ha, ha, ha! 'S good un, Chief."

The Chief in the engine looked as if he thought it was a very good one.

"Jes' a little word of warnin' to th' Customs from you, Chief. Now a bottle of beer couldn't leak through. That'll cook old Chilt. That'll ——"

The telephone bell jangled harshly, imperatively. Chief Turberry lumbered over to it rapidly.

"Waverly's on fire!" came the appeal. "Our own department's helpless. Hurry!"

The chief rushed outside. Five miles to the south he saw a black column of smoke rising, growing denser. With astonishing agility, he dashed back in and tugged at the tower bell rope. And on his face settled the look of one who anticipates a sweet triumph.

MacGreggortown's trusty flame fighters came tumbling in from their prosaic daily occupations. Motors sputtered, coughed and broke into a crescendo of explosions. The MacGreggortown F. D., engine and hose cart, rumbled and roared out and hit the highway for a record run, Fire Chief James Turberry at the engine driver's side, an imposing figure in the sight of all.

In ten minutes the chief and his department were at the line and being cheered across and in fifteen, which was remarkable time considering the road, they were panting and bumping into Waverly.

Fire Chief Turberry leaped from his seat with a bellow. The fire was only an old barn and the smoke from two husky barbecues.

"Sorry, Chief," apologized Band Leader Chilton, stepping forward. "We were forced to false alarm you to some extent. But we'll pay for the gas. You see the Customs at the line were warned by some one, who shall be nameless, and they tightened up on us. Men, do your duty!"

Citizens of Waverly stepped forward and began to remove bottles of whiskey from ingenious hiding places about the MacGreggortown fire engine.

"You framed this on me and had me bring your stuff across!" the Chief roared.

"Sad but true," said Leader Chilton. "But there was a terrible drought here. Now the hose cart."

Several cases were removed from the hose cart. Then there was a cry from the toiling citizens.

A dilapidated Indian was dragged from under a seat in the cart. It was Chief Charley Horse, clutching a half empty bottle which was wrested from him. At once he began to recite appealingly:

"Little cared he for their insults,
For the women and the maidens
Loved the handsome Pau-Puk-Keewis."

About Fire Chief Turberry the air became thunderous and blue. Ordering his men aboard, he stamped wildly on the self starter and the MacGreggortown F. D. turned homeward.

Back from the floor of the hose cart floated a lugubrious voice—

"Thus departed Hiawatha,
Hiawatha the Beloved."

THE epochal run of the MacGreggortown fire department across the line with a load of fire water became a veritable border ballad. Men joyously swapped the yarn through state and province and it spread east and west. Even the Customs force were inclined to see the point of the jest, once they had discovered there had been no collusion in the rum running. But in the bosom of Fire Chief Turberry it rankled sore.

Outwardly his aspect was pompously

serene amid a storm of spoofing. The joke was on him, he admitted magnanimously, and to give his words weight he became the prime mover in urging that Orlando Chilton and his Waverly band be invited to provide melodious strains for the MacGreggortown rodeo.

That was downright handsome of the chief, it was generally agreed. The rodeo was his time of triumph, a time when he became a pioneer of pioneers, when booted, spurred, pink-shirted and two-gallon hatted, he rode about the field as a judge of events. Contestants deferred to him then and tourists gaped and took innumerable pictures of him. Yet at such a time he was willing to import for the common weal a bunch of horn tooters who had made him the butt of international mirth.

Chief Turberry basked in the popular esteem. He was delighted that others thought well of his gesture—even without knowing the half of it.

The suspicious comment of Band Leader Chilton on the invitation was—

"What's that old stuffed shirt up to now?"

But he hastened to accept such a remunerative engagement for his organization. He and his enthusiastic musicians rolled up promptly in a bus on the appointed day and soon the stands were resounding to their blare. Baton waving elegantly, the tall, willowy leader, white-clad and bemedalled, incited his men to blasts of greater prowess. The Waverly band made up in volume for its other deficiencies, and volume, after all, is the heavy notion for a rodeo.

Never one to merge with the background, Leader Chilton expanded genially under the attention which the blasts of his band brought him. He no longer beat a mere tempo but made infinite stage business of it. His eagle glance was everywhere. No cowboy was piled by a broncho without an accompanying thump on the bass drum, called for by the alert Mr. Chilton.

The bawling of calfs ducking out from under a rope was supplemented by squeals from the piccolo in the reluctant but able hands of Musician Sniffen. In fact, at the close of the rodeo, the band was popularly declared to have been half the show.

Fire Chief Turberry rode sadly in from the field. All day he had gone virtually unwept, unhonored and unsung. Not even the poor decisions which he had lavished, had succeeded in making him a storm center and the cynosure of all eyes. That whitewashed beanpole of a band leader had stolen his thunder again, with his monkeyshines and his boiler factory band.

Worse yet, he was still at it. A crowd of the late-stayers in the field had collected around the bandstand and from which Leader Chilton was haranguing them, holding them open-mouthed. His voice rolled out sonorously and from time to time he struck a most dramatic attitude.

Turberry unobtrusively got within earshot. Leader Chilton, it seemed, was revealing more of his colorful past. Following his pioneer days, he was relating, he had enjoyed a brief but striking career on the stage. As friend to friend, he was saying, he would tell this little circle of he-men who had gathered around him of a night of adventure as an actor which no frontier yarn could surpass.

Chief Turberry slipped away. He found a certain shambling Indian in greasy buckskin and repeated to him instructions given earlier in the day. The Indian nodded and licked his lips as the fire chief delivered a large, heavy package into his hands. With further commands, supplemented by threats, the fire chief left.

Back at the bandstand, the crowd was all Leader Chilton's, as he swung into the stirring conclusion of his tale.

"And so men lay dead and dying in the streets of New York and others fled the scene with smoking pistols," he was narrating intensely. "Could I have the blood on my head of men who affirmed or denied that I had outdone my rivals and had acted the best Hamlet of the age? Never! From that day forth I quit the profession. As to who was the best Hamlet, posterity says——"

"You were!" a little bandsman shouted, leaping to his feet. "You were," Sniffen loyally repeated, adding—"or I'm no tuba player!"

Leader Chilton smiled gravely in acknowledgment of applause, circulated for a time among the admiring throng; then he marshalled his band into a bus and the drive home commenced.

"Boss," Little Sniffen whispered, leaning over, "say, boss—"

"Say no more, Sniffen," Leader Chilton replied majestically. "When we dismount to play across the line in our usual manner, you may relinquish your piccolo and perform on the tuba which, I note, you had hopefully brought along."

The bandsman beamed radiantly. He barely restrained himself from dragging his beloved tuba from its case, where it had rested under a bus seat, and beginning to warm up on it at once.

At last—it seemed an hour to Sniffen—the bus approached the line and halted. Customs officials hurried vigilantly from their quarters, apparently planning to make a strict inspection.

Band Leader Chilton looked puzzled. This was extraordinary. Surely none of his band were trying to bring through some hootch so recently after the fire-engine episode.

Then into his view came the stout horseman who had followed up the bus, keeping out of sight.

"Turberry!" Chilton groaned. "The dastard! He's planted something on us."

The band was prepared to play but Chilton gave no signal. An expression of deep disappointment began to spread over the features of Bandsman Sniffen who stood embracing his tuba, lips puckered at the mouthpiece, lungs filled for a mighty blast.

"We got word you fellers are tryin' to run some stuff across on us," accused the Customs head. "Twice is too much. I guess it'll be jail for the ringleader this time." A stern glance at Leader Chilton. "Come on. Where's th' liquor?"

Fire Chief Turberry trotted up. "I'll save you trouble," he declared, with a chuckle that was fairly fiendish. "Jes' take a look in that big horn th' little chap is packing. It's chuck full of pint bottles of red-eye!"

Sniffen clutched his tuba like a man who is frozen to a live wire. The Customs force moved on him in a body.

Then a clatter of hoofs resounded on the MacGreggortown road.

A SWAYING Indian was galloping up, hands extended, in one of them a bottle, in the other a sort of rod.

In a second more he was recognized as Chief Charley Horse. He halted, recited some poetry, took a drink from the bottle and came on again. He flourished the bottle and held out to Fire Chief Turberry the article in his other hand.

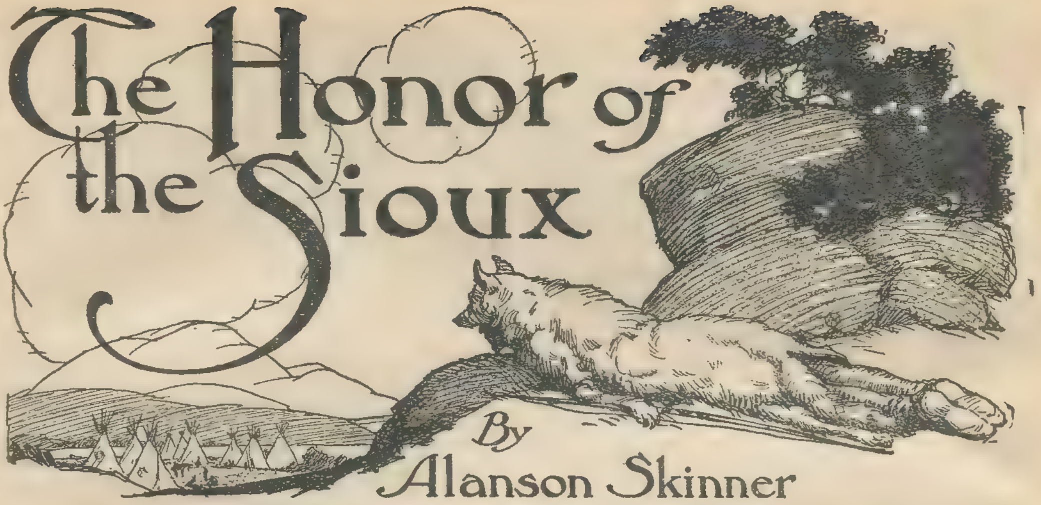
"It's my piccolo!" Sniffen cried. He inverted the tuba. It was empty.

Thickly yet plaintively, Charley Horse addressed the fire chief:

"You tellum put hooch in him moosic in bus. I take an' do. All run out holes." And he flung the piccolo away in disgust.

After the sounds of pursuit had died away up the MacGreggortown road, the Waverly band marched across the line playing. The tune selected by Leader Chilton was "Hail to the Chief."

The Honor of the Sioux



By Alanson Skinner

Author of "Wolf Medicine," "A Well in the Desert," etc.

MY Crow Indian friend Scalplock toasted his moccasined feet before the open log fire. Twenty-four below zero was what the thermometer registered outside, but within it was warm and cozy, and our comfort was only increased by the howling of the wind that could not reach us. Scalplock rested the stone bowl of his long pipe on the hearth, puffed contentedly for a while and then passed it to me.

"My grandfather, Scalplock the first, used to talk to me on winter nights, when I was a boy, and tell me the story of his life, and the ways of our people," said Scalplock at last. "I never tired of hearing him. He spoke much of our wars with the other nations of the Northwest, of pitched battles, and of combats where two picked men, one from each side, fought it out between the drawn-up lines of warriors, and the victory of the day fell to those whose champion prevailed.

"There was much talk about the two great warrior societies of the Crow, the Foxes and Lump-woods, who vied with each other to see which had the braver members, and he told me much about our neighbors, our friends, and our enemies. Particularly, he spoke of the Sioux, who were brave, and the Blackfoot who were cowardly.

"When my grandfather was a young man he fell in love with a chief's daughter. He was rich, handsome, and well mannered, but as yet he had not made a name for himself. He had never stolen a horse from the camp of the enemy, or taken a gun from a foe, or counted a coup of any sort. Therefore the girl laughed at him, and he became sick at heart, and desired to die.

"About that time a famous warrior, named Bullsnake, announced that he and two companions were going against the Sioux to capture horses. My grandfather mounted his best buffalo running horse, with its beautiful saddle and all its trappings. He rode over to Bullsnake's teepee and picketed the horse outside, then he went in.

" 'My father,' he said, 'they say that you are going to war. It is in my heart that I should like to join you. Therefore I have tied a horse outside as a gift.' "

Bullsnake shook his gray head:

"No, grandson. In my dream that told me to go to war two was the number of companions that I saw. If you were to go with us, it is almost certain that you would be killed. At least my medicine would not be responsible for your safety.'

" 'Hau,' replied my grandfather, 'I am a man! I am not afraid to die! To lie dead on the prairie with my wounds in front is all that I ask of you.'

" 'It is good then,' said Bullsnake. 'We will start just before dawn.'

"To be a young man on his first war party, especially an extra one, is a hard thing. My grandfather had to provide the meat and cook it for the others. He had to make the camps and fetch water. He had to stand the extra rounds of guard duty. Everything that was hard, or dirty, or dangerous, they sent him about.

"It was a long hard weary journey on foot to the Sioux country. Warriors always walk on a raid of that sort. They expect to ride back on the horses that they have captured. They have to keep a very sharp lookout, for if they should happen to run into a war party of the enemy they stand little chance of escape, being so few in numbers, and often, as in this case, they take only their bows and arrows and their knives. My grandfather and the rest of Bullsnake's war party wore out many pairs of moccasins on the road.

"Finally they came on a large Sioux camp in the Black Hills. Bullsnake himself was the one who discovered the presence of the enemy. He was acting as scout, a dozen miles ahead of his followers. He wore a huge white wolf skin, with the head and ears attached, over his head, and whenever he came to a rise of ground he would crawl up it on all fours and peer over the sky line.

"He looked and acted just like a wolf, so that if the enemy saw him from a distance, they would pay him no attention. That was the way that it happened in this case. Bullsnake discovered the camp just when the sun was noon high, and he lay there on the prairie watching the Sioux all afternoon. He saw where they herded their horses, and he observed where the fast horses were picketed, inside the camp circle, after the herds were brought in at dusk.

"In this way he was able to discover just where the valuable horses were kept, and saved his men and himself a lot of trouble on their return. No one molested him at all. If any saw him they must have thought that he was just an old white buffalo wolf, foraging around.

"When it was dark enough to obscure everything on the open prairie, Scalplock returned to his party. They then advanced cautiously to the Sioux camp, which by that time was wrapped in the deepest sleep. All of the warriors had a medicine that allayed the suspicions of dogs so that they would not bark at them, and armed with this, and their knives they slipped in among the painted teepees and cut loose the horses. They muffled their hoofs with rags, and led them quietly out of the camp and mounted them.

"It seemed that the pony that my grandfather had taken was given to the bad habit of bucking tremendously for a moment or so when it was first mounted, and grandfather was thrown over its head—he had no saddle, you know—and only a rope twisted around its lower jaw for a bridle.

"He was up again in a moment, and never let the bridle rope fall from his hand. so that he was able to mount, and this time, as he was prepared, when the horse bucked again, he was not thrown, and in a few moments the four Crow were well on their way back to the Big Horn mountains.

"GRANDFATHER did not notice till later that he had dropped his quiver, bow, and arrows, and then it was too late to go back after them. That is the reason, the Sioux said afterwards, that they knew it was a party of Crow who had taken those horses. They slept soundly until morning, when the loss was discovered, and in a few moments the track of the fugitives was seen by one of them.

"It did not take long for them to find the quiver then, and its characteristic porcupine quillwork told them more plainly than words or signs that it was Crow. So they gathered a large party with plenty of spare horses, and set out in pursuit.

"Meantime Bullsnake and his men pushed on all night and all the next day. They halted the next night, for they were now far away, and watered and rested their horses, and slept a little while. Then they were off again.

"They had taken the fastest horses in the Sioux camp and they thought that now, almost at the border of their own country, they were safe, but not so. The Sioux, with their relays of fresh ponies, were in plain sight on the prairie before the sun was two hours high.

"All morning the Sioux kept up the chase. There were fifty of them, well armed, and exulting in the thought that they had four Crow in their power. The Crow rode on and on and on, but their horses began to play out, and every mile the Sioux gained on them.

"The first horse to give out altogether was that of a young man named Buffalo Chip. His horse simply could not keep up, no matter how he urged it. He fell farther and farther behind, and one Sioux, who rode on a very fast horse, overtook him, just as his animal stumbled and fell.

"The Crow managed to fall clear of his mount, and he was on his feet as the Dakota warrior rode up, with his eagle feather war bonnet streaming out in the breeze. But the Crow had lost his knife in the grass when he tumbled, and was helpless, so he folded his arms and waited with chest thrust out to receive the Sioux lance and die like a man.

“Now the Sioux who was bearing down on him was a very brave man named Iron Bear, who had killed more enemies than any other man in his band, and counted so many coups that he was beyond the rules of warriors, for there were none to step forward and tell of a braver deed than any he had performed.

“As he dashed up he was singing the war song of his people, ‘It is better to die naked!’ Meaning, of course, upon the warpath, but when he saw that helpless Crow, standing there, waiting for the death stroke, he had pity on him. He raised his lance and reined in his horse.

“ ‘Who are you, Crow?’ he signaled.

“ ‘I am called Buffalo Chip,’ replied the other in the sign language.

“ ‘Live then, Buffalo Chip,’ cried the Dakota in his own tongue, and then he dismounted and went over and shook hands with him. “If I had a son of your age—as, alas, I have only daughters—’ he signed, ‘this is the way I should want him to look fearlessly upon death. And if he were ever in the hands of the enemy I should pray to Wakanda that they should spare his life.

“ ‘Go home and tell your father that Iron Bear, the Dakota chief of the Oglalas, who has counted more coups than he has fingers and toes, sends back his son with this horse and all its trappings, to tell him that Buffalo Chip is a man.’

“Then the old Sioux struck the young Crow lightly over the shoulder with his lance to count coup on him, and helped him into his own saddle, and Buffalo Chip was away like the wind and got home in safety long before the others.

“By this time the Sioux on their fresh ponies had sent outriders on both sides of the fleeing Crow, the three who had kept on. It was plain that there was small hope of escape. They were riding bunched, very close together, when Bullsnake spoke.

“ ‘My grandsons, if I keep up running any longer I shall become overheated, and my flesh will make poor provender for some hungry wolf. It is in my heart to stop here and die. To die with honor is to be remembered among our people.’

“Oh grandfather, you have spoken well,’ said Scalplock, ‘but you are an old man, and your flesh is lean and tough. There is not enough to make a meal for a hungry wolf. I will die here also, that he may be satisfied.’

“The third man, whose name was Hairy Bear, pulled up his horse and dismounted also.

“ ‘I am fond of animals,’ he said. ‘It is in my heart to give this wolf you speak of a feast. The flesh of three of us ought to go a long ways toward making even a wolf fat, comrades.’

“So there they were, alone, dismounted, on the prairie, armed only with their knives, and surrounded by half a hundred Sioux, who, seeing that they had no firearms, rode in close, and encircled them in a dense mass. The three Crow stood back to back, knife in hand, and joined their voices in the death song of our people:

“ ‘Earth and sky are everlasting
  Men must die—
Old age is a thing of evil—
  Charge, and die!’

“Now Bullsnake could talk the Dakota or Sioux language very well, and he could hear the Sioux speaking among themselves.

“ ‘These be *men*,’ cried one. ‘Shall we slay them for the sake of a few horses?’

“Another called out:

“ ‘Behold, there are fifty of us and only three of these Crow. If we kill them there will not be honor enough to go round.’

“ ‘Let us feed them and rest them, and three of ours can fight them on the prairie,” suggested another.

“MEANWHILE they all leaned on their lances and stared at the Crow, who on their part showed no fear, and stared back at them with level eyes. Finally a man who seemed to be a chief, who wore a scalp-trimmed shirt and a war bonnet with buffalo horns upon it, spoke out in a loud voice:

“ ‘Let the four whose horses were stolen decide the fate of the Crow warriors!’

And there was a loud cry of ‘Hau! Hau!’ from all the Sioux.

“Four Dakota were shoved forward into the circle, all speaking at once, and with one thought:

" 'Let us spare them! It has been a good chase, and they have shown themselves to be men. Let us each count coup upon them and set them free, as Iron Bear has already shown us how to do.'

"So the four advanced on the three Crow, and Bullsnake made his men sheath their knives, while the Dakota counted coup on them by touching them with a weapon, or even shaking hands.

" 'Are you going to let these brave enemies walk home empty handed as they came to us?' asked the chief with the scalp shirt. "What will they say to their people about the Dakota? They will say that we are not generous. Let us shut their mouths entirely, so that they will be glad to say only good things about our nation, and will be willing to come to fight us again. If all our enemies are cowardly, like the Ojibway, how will our young men ever get strong hearts and learn to fight like our fathers before us?'

"Again all the Dakota assembled chorused 'Hau! Hau!' and men began to dismount and give their horses to the Crow. Bullsnake, who was the leader, received ten, my grandfather got six, and the other man, Hairy Bear, who was known to some of the Dakota as an older man and a warrior, received eight. Then the Dakota gave them presents of robes and garments, and food to make them strong, 'so that they would have the courage to raid us again,' said one old Sioux, laughing.

"The Dakota escorted the three Crow to the borders of their own country, where they would be safe from marauding bands of Blackfeet, and then turned back. No one can deny that the Dakota are fierce and proud, but it is equally true that they are a generous people, and bear themselves with honor."

"But how about your grandfather, Scalplock the first, Nuwida?' I asked my companion. 'Did he marry the girl who had refused him before he went to war with Bullsnake?'

"My friend," said Scalplock, pulling his blanket around him, "there are many women, and the pursuit of them is like the hunting of a buffalo. If you miss one, there are always more in the herd. My grandfather, having made a name for himself in war, looked higher, and eventually married the daughter of a much greater chief."

The fire had burned itself away to a heap of embers, so, after throwing on a little fresh wood to dispell the chill we rolled up in our blankets and turned in for the night.

The Kaid of El-Sibba

An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali

By George E. Holt

Author of "Chuckling Gold," "The Decree of Allah," etc.

Did not Allah, in His great laughing mood,
Ordain that Evil should be spun with Good?
Then how can we, with awkward, sightless hands,
Unsnarl the skein He only understands?
From the Berber.

ALI MASHAWI, Kaid and headman of the village of El-Sibba, lord of a few thousand acres of hills, sovereign of a dozen rude straw-roofed cottages of stone and mud, commander of twenty fighting men, master of the sixty or seventy noncombatants who constituted their families, liege of an equal number of noisy, hungry, flea-bitten dogs, autocrat of a dozen donkeys—Kaid Mashawi sat upon the cushions in his cottage upon a certain fair morning, tossed away an only half smoked cigaret, yawned, and cursed mildly because of the lack of interest offered by a pastoral life among the foothills of the Atlas.

In his curses was mentioned the name of him who was now *basha* of Tangier. Perhaps the *basha* deserved the remembrance, inasmuch as it was he, who, by discovering some of the Kaid's peculiarities in accounting for the local taxes in Tangier, where he had been a subcollector, had caused difficulties which resulted in the practical banishment of the Kaid to his own village on an indeterminate sentence.

In other words, he was to rusticate until some one got ready to let him return. And in case they forgot all about him, which was a thing not unlikely to occur, his period of exile from profitable fields might become an extended one. His short, brown body would grow rotund through laziness and much food, his beard would grow long and scraggly through carelessness, his whole physique would go entirely to the dogs.

The contrast between the big city of Tangier and the miserable little village of El-Sibba rankled constantly in the Kaid's mind. He was not the type of man who finds his ambitions satisfied by making large splashes in a small puddle. Wherefore, as he cursed, he evolved a somewhat indirect appeal to a compassionate god to rescue him from his boredom.

This same god, whose name is Allah, seemed to take startlingly immediate recognition of the plea. Perhaps Allah Himself was idle at the moment; perhaps the Recording Angel, Al-Sijil, in whose scrolls the record of the Kaid was kept, resented the additional work involved by ill-considered appeals and hence took the matter immediately to his superior for action; or perhaps it was, instead of any of these, the Evil One, Shaitan, who intercepted the message and busied himself in the affairs of the master of El-Sibba.

However this may be, not a handful of minutes had passed before a villager came panting to the master's cottage and begged that he follow at once to look upon a stranger who had been injured and to direct what was to be done with him.

Kaid Mashawi, glad of diversion, rose quickly and accompanied the villager to a spot where most of the population of El-Sibba had gathered, dogs included, and there found stretched upon the ground a

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man apparently close to death. The Kaid knelt and felt for heart beat, and was reassured. Then he examined the face, but it was one he did not recognize. And after this, he ascertained the nature of the man's wounds to be severe cuts and bruises about the head, a broken arm.

"Who," he asked, "found him? And where?"

At the question a brutal-faced, shifty-eyed fellow, standing with one hand resting upon the shoulder of a man who, judging from facial characteristics, might have been his brother, made answer.

"I—we found him, O Sidi," he said. "I and my brother. He—he fell from his horse, near the spring on the road."

"Fell from his horse!" Kaid Mashawi snorted disbelief. "Since when did Riffians begin to fall from their horses—like the Christians?"

"That—that was when his horse—when his horse suddenly reared, O Sidi," stammered the villager.

"Hmph! And what caused the horse to rear?" continued the Kaid.

"It reared, O Sidi, when—when I fired my gun."

"Hhm! And your gun was fired, no doubt, when you pulled the trigger, and the trigger was pulled when— *Y'Allah!* Why did you shoot at the horse?" demanded Mashawi, losing patience with the slow-minded lout.

"I did not, O Sidi," returned the fellow. "I did not shoot at the horse, but to stop the rider. Whereupon the horse reared and the rider fell off and—and hurt himself."

"That was even as he has said," chimed in the face-brother.

"But—but—*Allah kerim!* Why did you shoot at all?" howled the Kaid. "A taste of the whip may cause your speech to be clearer."

"Nay, Sidi, nay! All shall be made clear at once. At once. The answer is simple. We met this fellow upon the road by the spring. At least, he was on the road. I was among the rocks and my brother was with me. We had stopped there to rest for a while, having been out seeking wild pig, and to discuss the matter of the garden of——"

"*Hollah!* Bring me at once the whip. 'Tis in my house." The angry voice of the Kaid interrupted him.

"No! No!" the villager made haste to proceed. "He was not one of us, O Sidi—and he appeared as one who—who might have something of value upon his person. And we are poor, Sidi, as you know. It is no crime to take from the stranger when one is poor."

"Ah! Now we have it."

The Kaid shrugged his shoulders. He was administrator of the law for the village, in his position as headman, but, even as the villager had said, it was no crime to rob the stranger passing by. But there was another phase of it.

"And what found you upon his person?"

"Nothing. Nothing, Sidi." This from both brothers. "Nothing but a few silver coins. See, here they are——"

A brown hand fished them from a greasy leather *shakarah* and offered them to the Kaid, who smiled at them with disdain; whereupon the villager quickly restored them to his bag.

"Remove his turban," ordered the Kaid. "Wash his head and bind it with the cloth. When he can speak, notify me."

He turned to go, but at the instant his eyes were caught by a folded paper which fell from the folds of the injured man's headdress as one of the villagers unwound it. Turbans are not commonly the hiding place of unimportant documents.

"Give me," he ordered, and the paper was placed in his hand. Unfolding it he glanced through it, read the signature with big eyes, and reread the letter. Then he turned again to his people.

"Guard that man carefully. You, Si Ahmed, with three men. If he escapes—your children will lack a father. Tie him; lock him up; and watch doors and windows—aye, and the roof. He is no child."

He strode back to his cottage to think. It seemed to have grown more spacious, more sightly; the sun seemed brighter, the air was more friendly; the chatter of women and the laughter of children smote his ear pleasantly. He was not at all bored. The letter was from Sid Achmed Baghdadi, formerly vizier, now in hiding among the hills, to Mohamed Ali, formerly a *basha*, and now a political outlaw with prices upon his head.

THE result of the mental operations of Kaid Mashawi was an acorn of action which was destined to grow swiftly into a large oak of consequences. Some of these consequences already were perceptible to the inner eye of the ambitious Kaid; others, and those of most importance, were still written upon invisible pages in the merciful Book of Fate.

The Kaid, while a smile of grim satisfaction assumed many swiftly changing forms upon his face, summoned to his cushions one of his most faithful and most stupid followers, Buselham. There was method in his choice: The mission upon which the Kaid intended sending Buselham was one which he did not care to have understood, nor even shrewdly guessed at, by any save himself.

And besides being faithful and stupid, Buselham had another attribute which in some instances had added to his usefulness; in the long past days of his young manhood his tongue had wagged indiscreetly, with the result that an impulsive *basha* had ordred it cut off. Thus Buselham, unable to talk, unable to think much or quickly, unable to read or write—able only to hear—was a perfect tool for his master's present purpose.

This purpose was speedily made clear.

"Here," he said to Buselham, who stood before him, "is a letter. You are to take this letter, with all speed—all speed, understand—to the village of es-Schuan. Do you know where it is?"

Buselham shook his head doubtfully, but pointed north, and raised eyes and chin in inquiry.

Kaid Mashawi nodded agreement.

"Fortunately," he said to himself as well as to Buselham, "I chance to know where it is. An insignificant village lost among the hills. Safe hiding place for Mohamed Ali! Until he is discovered," he added. "I passed by it once, years ago. It lies—now pay close attention—it lies about two miles east from the old shrine of Sidi Malek, which is on the road between here and Tetwan. You know the shrine?"

Buselham nodded assent.

"Good, then. Go to the shrine and continue past it for a matter of perhaps five hundred paces. Then on the right hand side you will find a little-used trail running east to the hills. Follow this trail about two miles, passing over the hills, and you will come to es-Schuan. That is clear?"

The mute wagged his head in assent.

"*M'zien!* Give this letter, then, to any man in the village. If any ask questions—you cannot answer. Except that if they ask whence you came, although there is little chance, I think, that they will do so, make them understand that it is from a place south of here. They must not know that I am your master, nor that you come from this village. This is important. When you have delivered the letter, I think that you will be given another one. That one you will bring to me swiftly—but no one must know that you do so. Is all clear?"

Buselham made motions to signify that he understood—pantomime which showed him speeding to es-Schuan with the letter, delivering it, receiving another and speeding back. And a somewhat dirty brown hand placed upon his mouth indicated his understanding that the matter was a secret one.

He put in his leather *shakarah* the letter from the ex-vizier Baghdadi to Mohamed Ali, salaamed, and left the cottage. Within a minute his horse's hoofs were stirring up little yellow whirlpools of dust as he galloped down the hills to the road which led to es-Schuan, carrying with him the fate of the ex-vizier and Mohamed Ali.

A little after midday Buselham's lathered horse carried him into the village where were Mohamed Ali and his friends. He was accompanied by a picket who had joined him suddenly and unexpectedly as soon as he had left the main road, and who, when the letter had been exhibited, mounted behind him and rode with him to the village.

This picket led him at once to a little thatched roof cottage wherein, upon floor cushions, sat a big, brown, bearded man and a companion who, it might be noted, now that his fez and turban had been laid aside, had but one ear.

Buselham looked into the face of the big man and was startled. But his reflexes were so slow that his dismay was concealed by the business of taking the letter from his *shakarah* and handing it to the big man. He recognized him as Mohamed Ali.

The outlaw took the letter and made a gesture of dismissal.

"Give him a place to rest," he commanded the picket.

As they passed from the room he unfolded the letter and read it aloud to his first scribe, he of the one ear:

> "From the former vizier, Sid Achmed Baghdadi, to his friend Mohamed Ali, greetings. The wild boars are gathering in

> the forest and the eagles are changing their dwelling places. I would meet my friend at sunset of the 15th day of this blessed month of Ramadan at the shrine of Sidi Malek. I shall assume that you will come to the place appointed."

"Hmph!" grunted Mohamed Ali, looking into the eyes of Sid Hamed Mortadi, his first scribe. " 'The wild boars are gathering, eh? And the eagles change their eyries! In plain words, the sultan is being surrounded by European plotters, and those who would protect him are being thrust from his side. Hmph! This was inevitable, of course. As foreign influence grows, his own influence weakens. Enough of it, and his people will rise against him. France will secure control of him, or of his successor."

"There is his half-brother, Mulai Hafid, at Marraksh," offered Mortadi.

Mohamed Ali shrugged his shoulders.

"I would as lief see a French sultan upon the Shareefian throne, as a German sultan," he growled, and the man with only one ear nodded his head in silent assent.

"I shall meet the vizier," said Mohamed Ali. "He is wise in affairs of state, but I think he was unwise in writing such a letter as this. It might have gone astray."

"And yet," offered Mortadi, "you would scarcely have made rendezvous without such confirmation as this letter gives you. Any one might send a messenger saying to Mohamed Ali, 'Meet me to-morrow at the shrine of Sidi Malek,' and—Mohamed Ali would not go."

"That is true. Write you, then, a word to the vizier saying that the one to whom his letter was addresssed will meet him at the time and place stated. There will be no signature."

The first scribe took paper and bamboo pen and a little vial of ink from a gaudily painted wooden box beside him, and wrote as ordered; then sprinkled fine sand upon the written words to dry them, read the message to Mohamed Ali, and, upon his nod of approval, folded it in a manner which makes envelops unnecessary for Moorish correspondence.

Mohamed Ali clapped his hands in summons to a servant and ordered that the messenger be brought into his presence.

"I will bring him at once," said the servant. "We have found that he is without tongue, and consequently cannot speak." He withdrew, shortly to return with Buselham.

"You are tongueless?" asked Mohamed Ali.

Buselham nodded his head in assent and opened his mouth in proof.

"Can you return to your master at once?" asked Mohamed Ali.

A slow nod gave assent, and at the same time intimated that Buselham was still tired from his northward ride. This was the first slow thought which came into his head when Mohamed Ali asked the question; but it was soon followed, even before he got through nodding, by a second thought: His master had told him to return with all speed, wherefore the nodding became more rapid.

"Rest an hour first," said Mohamed Ali, kindly, "and then——"

But now Buselham shook his head negatively and made a notion with his arm toward the south, a gesture which clearly showed his desire to begin his return journey at once.

"As you like," said Mohamed Ali, and handed him the reply to the ex-vizier. "Take this to your master, then. And also—" He drew from his *shakarah* a gold coin, which he placed on top of the message as he handed it to Buselham. The follower of Kaid Mashawi smiled at sight of the gold, dropped both gold and letter into his own greasy *shakarah*, and strode from the room.

LAZILY Sid Mortadi, the first scribe, rose and followed. Some tiny whisper had come to him. Nothing that he could analyze. Why had the mute so suddenly changed his slow nod of assent to his immediate departure to a quick nod indicating desire to depart at once?

Sid Mortadi shrugged his shoulders and laughed at himself. He saw the messenger swing into saddle and ride down the hill. His own horse was near at hand, ready saddled. Mortadi mounted and rode slowly in the wake of Buselham. Not consciously following him, because he intended to take, at the foot of the hill, a path which led almost opposite to that which Buselham would follow.

Upon reaching the foot of the hill, he hesitated; a feeling of doubt came upon him again, and without any definite plan, he turned his horse's head in the direction taken by the mute. But the more he thought about the matter as his horse jogged along, the more assured he was that his disquiet was foolish, and finally with a jerk of impatience he turned his horse at right angles to the road he had been pursuing and started at a canter across country. This caused him to ride south, in a direction which, if followed, would bring him into the main road again.

For a while he galloped steadily on and then drew in his horse to plod up a small hill. Atop of this hill he looked over the surrounding plain, toward the main road which led south. And there he saw something which again caused his doubts to rise and assail him. A horseman whom he immediately identified as the mute messenger, was galloping at all speed down the road.

Here was something tangible; the messenger had a dozen hours at least to make the return trip of not over two score miles. Why then, did he hasten in such a manner? Why did he not spare a horse which had just finished a forty-mile journey?

Sid Mortadi looked back toward the hills which hid the village wherein was Mohamed Ali, and he looked south again toward the speeding horseman. Then he dug spurs into his own horse, dashed down the hill, and after Buselham. There was something wrong. He felt it now throughout his being.

He made his decision. He would overtake the messenger and ride with him to the village from which the vizier had written. In that way only would he satisfy his distrust. Impossible to return to Mohamed Ali and acquaint him with his fears; his only chance was to overtake the messenger, whose horse, despite the forty miles, seemed still to have a speed exceeding that of his own.

Before the first scribe had reached the main road the horseman he pursued had disappeared over the top of the faraway hill. This road is little more than a well-worn trail, twisting for the most part like a snake, through the hilly country, but now and then, for no known reason, leaving the line of least resistance and dashing up a sudden rise to tumble down upon the other side.

Topping the hill in his turn, the first scribe saw his quarry still galloping, a mile or more ahead; saw him twist out of sight around another hill. He spurred on, his mind trying to find an answer to the situation. At times he was inclined to check his horse and turn back, but the sense of pursuit — of necessary pursuit — swept over reason.

Nothing definite was there to make him suspect that the messenger was other than he appeared to be. Mohamed Ali's hiding place was known to the ex-vizier Baghdadi, his interests were the interests of Baghdadi, the letter was unquestionably a letter written and signed by Baghdadi, and there were the best of reasons for a meeting between the ex-vizier and Mohamed Ali.

The place indicated for the meeting was a logical one, a point approximately half way between the domiciles of the two parties. And yet—ahead of him a man, having twelve hours or more to cover forty miles—rode a horse as though Shaitan were after him. The first scribe cast reason from him with a shrug of his shoulders, surrendered to his inexplicable suspicion, and made pursuit of the messenger his one thought.

The feet of his horse counted off at half-second intervals an hour, two hours, steadily as a clock. Still the distance remained the same between pursuer and pursued. And that the messenger knew now that he was pursued was evident. The first scribe looked at the sun, and saw that darkness would overtake them within the hour. And as he thought of this, he remembered that a mile ahead the road made a detour around a broad, low hill which already spread out ahead of him.

The fleeing horsemen had already made the turn and was a fourth of the way around the hill. The first scribe reached the rise, and without reining his horse from its gallop, drove it straight up the hill.

It was covered with brush that came to his stirrups, but after a little he came to a faint path. From the summit he saw Buselham directly ahead of him: He had cut the distance between them to perhaps three hundred yards. He crashed down the hill in pursuit. But strive as he would, the horses seemed to be too evenly matched to further reduce this distance.

After a few more miles had unrolled beneath him the first scribe drew his automatic and fired a shot in the air. But to this summons Buselham paid no attention, except to drive spurs viciously into his horse's flanks. This action added to the suspicions in Sid Mortadi's head. He fired again, and the bullet sent up a little fan of yellow dust beside the messenger.

Mortadi saw Buselham rein his horse to a sliding halt, and turn. He smiled to himself—but while the smile was still upon his face, the messenger whirled his horse and struck off across country, toward a nearby hill.

The first scribe spurred his horse and angled after him. Just as Buselham reached the foot of the hill, his horse missed its footing, stumbled and fell, throwing its rider heavily. The first scribe dashed up and dismounted, his pistol ready. But the fall seemed to have stunned the mute; he lay upon one side, with eyes closed, breathing hoarsely.

The scribe stooped and reached into the unconscious man's *shakarah* and took out the letter Mohamed Ali had written; he would take it to the ex-vizier himself. But as he rose, there was a shout. He looked about him and saw that four rifles, in the hands of a quartet of hillmen, were aimed at him. Swift as thought itself, he fired once, twice, three times; then a great white light exploded within him and existence ceased for a space.

WHEN the first scribe regained consciousness, he found himself lying upon rough cushions in a low-roofed hut. An effort to reach his aching head demonstrated that his hands were tied. Further effort to move resulted in the pull of bonds upon his ankles. With an effort he sat up, swaying drunkenly because of the pain in his head, and looked about him.

A dim light was made by a candle in the window, and by this he could discern that the poor hut contained another prisoner, bound like himself, lying upon a coarse mattress across the room. From outside came the deep hum of men's voices. He hissed, and at the sound the head of his fellow-prisoner turned toward him.

"Who are you?" whispered Mortadi, a suspicion beginning to form in his mind.

"A man who desires death," came the reply. "And I know not you."

"I am Hamed Mortadi, first scribe to—a friend of Sid Baghdadi." The whispered reply caused the man to start sharply.

"Mortadi! Then—then—I am Musa Abdi, a servant of the vizier. I came with a message to Mohamed Ali—but I am here."

"*Aweely! Aweely!*" groaned Mortadi, then; for now things were horribly clear. "How came you here?"

"Thus, Sidi: I was seized, but for robbery only. And then—the letter was found."

"By whom? By whom?" demanded Mortadi.

"By the Kaid of this village. I heard him called by the name of Kaid Mushawi."

"Kaid Mashawi! Allah's curses upon him! I know him. An evil man. And so he sent forward the letter by one of his own men—the mute. Khm! Would I had shot to kill."

"What say you? The letter was forwarded? To Mohamed Ali?" In his excitement the vizier's messenger rolled off his mattress, and nearer to the first scribe.

"A mute, whom, I know now, is one of Mashawi's men, brought a letter from your master to mine. All is clear now. I was suspicious without knowing why. I followed him upon his return with Mohamed Ali's answer. And the moment I had secured that letter, I too was seized."

"Then—what will be the result?" asked Abdi miserably.

"The result, unless two bound men can do something, is that your master and mine will meet to-morrow at the mosque of Sidi Abdeslam, and that they will be seized as prisoners by Kaid Mashawi. He will gain position and power thereby, and our masters will probably die."

"*Allah!*" groaned Abdi. "It is worse even than I thought. What—what can we do?"

"That," made answer Sid Mortadi, "is a question to which only Allah knows the answer. And if He does not intervene, our masters are lost. Now, if I could but free your hands——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of a guard, a low-browed, surly fellow, with a rifle, who approached him, untied the rope about his ankles, jerked him to his feet, and growled:

"My master, the Kaid, desires speech with you. Come."

The first scribe smiled wryly at his fellow prisoner at this abrupt termination of their plan, and accompanied his captor.

The first scribe faced Kaid Mashawi across a littered dinner table. On the far side of the eight-inch-high board the Kaid squatted on his cushions, smoking a cigaret. He had dined well, and the dynamic force of the *kesk'soo* and baked chicken and vegetables and bread and fruit had affected him, in conjunction with the present fortunate situation of the stars in his horoscope, like wine.

He had not dined alone, the Kaid, although no other diner had been visible to the eye of the slave who served him. Nevertheless there had been distinguished company present. The capture of the former vizier Baghdadi alone would be sufficient to make, or remake, his fortune; to restore to him favor, official position, the chance to gain wealth.

The capture of Mohamed Ali alone—success where all had failed for so long—would have won him even greater rewards—a great bashaship, a viziership, even. The capture of both of them, and on the very eve, no doubt, of the execution of a plot between them—*Allah!* What he should ask for would be his, without doubt.

Wherefore, it was scarcely Kaid Mashawi who dined this night, but a much greater person, a personage, whose individuality changed with the changing imagination and ambitions of the brain behind the Kaid's face. His Excellency the *Basha* of Tangier! Ah, that would be a sweet and profitable post, and would spell triumph over the present *basha*, his enemy.

His Excellency the *Basha* of Meknez: The women of Meknez were the most beautiful in all Al-Moghreb. His Excellency the *Basha* of Fez. The capital! The leading *basha* of them all. Or—would a bashaship be sufficient reward? Governor of a province, perhaps—as Mohamed Ali once had been.

Shawia Province was a wealthy one, and the governor now—yes, the present governor was the aged Mulai Amin, uncle of the sultan. He could be recalled. Baghdadi! Mohamed Ali! Perhaps a viziership, even. A position at court. Pointed out as the one who was great enough to snare the lions.

And thus there were many Mashawis who dined this night, with many invisible guests—*bashas* and governors and viziers; and even His Shareefian Majesty, the Sultan, Prince of Islam, Commander of the Faithful, came at the host's bidding, and partook of food, and was gracious to his new vizier.

Mastered by visions, Kaid Mashawi desired to show his power, to reveal his success, to exert dominion at the moment, if only over one well-born subject. Wherefore, in response to his summons, Sid Hamed Mortadi, first scribe, met his eyes across the table. A well-born subject, son of a vizier of a former reign, the blood of Mohamed and of sultans in his veins, high in the favor and councils of Mohamed Ali— The Kaid gazed through narrowed eyelids at his captive, and a form of madness descended upon him.

"Sit!" he commanded. "Here at my right. You shall be the guest of honor."

The first scribe bowed, smiled grimly and obeyed the order.

"I regret that your hands must remain bound," said the Kaid. "But—you are strong." His shrug explained further. "Tomorrow at this hour," he continued, "you will be—hm!—among friends."

"On earth or in Paradise?" inquired Mortadi gently.

The Kaid laughed.

"On earth," he assured the first scribe. "Oh, assuredly."

"And the friends you mention?"

"The ex-vizier Baghdadi," answered the Kaid, "and Mohamed Ali."

"Big names!" retorted Sid Mortadi. "Do the lions come to the jackal's feast!" But his heart grew cold.

At the question the Kaid's eyes flamed, but only for a moment; never had he been so able to accept insult with a smile.

"When the lions must," he answered. "Furthermore, they will be no longer dangerous: I shall cut their claws. There will be interesting events at the shrine of Sidi Abdeslam. But I shall take no chances; the trap will be well set when the lions walk into it."

THE first scribe did not need all this, in order to realize the deadly danger which faced Baghdadi and Mohamed Ali. The former would not await the return of his messenger; he would go to the shrine as had been planned, knowing that Mohamed Ali would be there—unless the messenger returned with words to the contrary. And Mohamed Ali planned to go, would go, of course.

The absence of himself, Mortadi, would in no wise affect his chief's plans. Baghdadi's messenger lay bound and guarded, without chance of escape. At least in time to be of use. He, himself, bound also. What could he do? No one in all the world, so far as he could see, could prevent the capture. He himself was as helpless as the Vizier and Mohamed Ali would be on the morrow.

"Ho! ho!" laughed the Kaid. "It will be

amusing. They will come alone, unattended, so as not to attract attention. *I* know. And there will be my men waiting. Pouf! and it will be finished."

"No doubt," agreed Mortadi. "No doubt. Have your men—hm!—no fear of Mohamed Ali?"

"*Allah akbar!* You do not suppose they know my plans. In truth, they might be afraid. But they know nothing. Nothing. To-morrow we ride. We conceal ourselves at the shrine. Two riders come. I order my men to seize them. Afterwards they find out whom they have seized. Now, I only know."

He lighted another cigaret, as a slave entered with a pot of fresh tea.

" 'I only know,' " the first scribe repeated silently to himself. "He only knows. If he were dead—" He looked suddenly at the figure of the Kaid with benign eyes—perhaps as Allah looks upon one whom He is about to call. But his heart leaped.

The slave set the teapot upon the table. at the right hand of the Kaid, between him and the first scribe.

"Another cup," ordered the Kaid, placing his own at his left hand. "I shall honor you by letting you drink tea with me. The strong can afford to be kind to the weak." He laughed, but there was little kindness in it.

The slave returned with another cup, and withdrew.

The Kaid opened the top of the pot, dropped into it a handful of broken sugar. Sprigs of fresh green mint protruded from the pot, and a delicious odor came forth.

Tensed now, the first scribe watched. He was cold—cold as steel is cold. Sixty seconds would determine the fate of Mohamed Ali and the vizier. The thumb of his right hand picked lightly at a broad, heavy silver ring upon the second finger of that hand.

"Add to your kindness," suggested the scribe, "by offering me a cigraet."

"Assuredly," answered Mashawi.

He held out the box. Mortadi's bound hands reached to it, across the open teapot. His fingers picked out a cigaret. Mortadi's gaze followed Mashawi's hand as he returned the box to the table—and from the silver ring on Mortadi's finger a tiny spray of white powder dropped unobserved into the teapot.

Kaid Mashawi struck a match and held it to the cigaret between the lips of Mortadi; then to his own.

He grasped the teapot and filled the two tiny cups.

He raised his cup to his bearded lips.

"A toast to the future—*my* future," said the Kaid, grinning broadly. "Drink!"

Thus the great moment came to Sid Hamed Mortadi, first scribe, and friend, of Mohamed Ali. What was ordained must be, and his own fingers had ordained this thing. One man only—Kaid Mashawi—knew of the meeting on the morrow. That one must die, in order that Mohamed Ali might live. And if two must die for that purpose—it was as Allah willed.

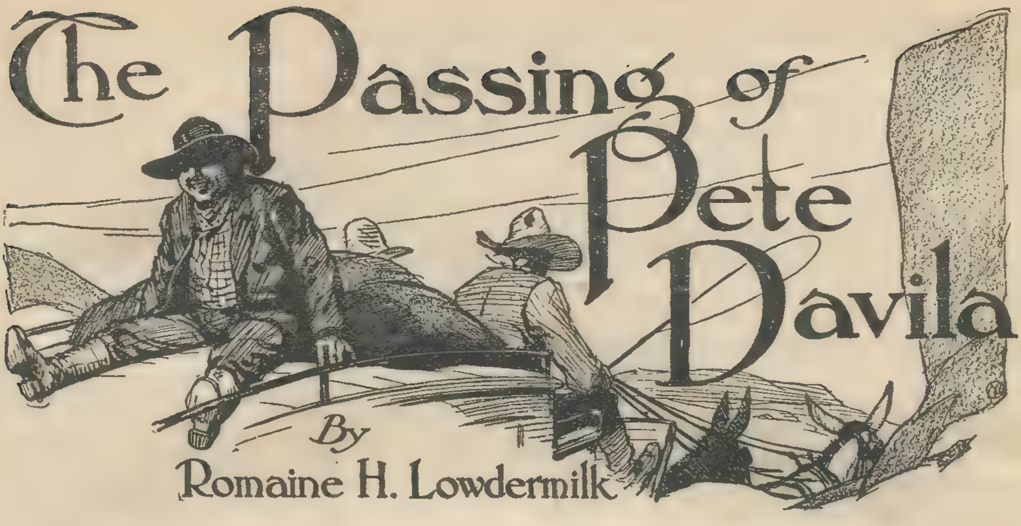
WITHOUT reply, with a hand as steady as if it raised a glass of pure water, the first scribe lifted his cup, touched his lips to it. He saw the Kaid waiting—a second's hesitation would raise suspicion, defeat his plan, leave Mohamed Ali to be a victim—and now would mean his own death by terrible means.

He drank, and the Kaid drank, and they set their cups back upon the saucers. A shiver shook the Kaid. He looked at the first scribe. His face suddenly grew gray and drawn. His eyes widened. His breath became a hiss. He pulled his eyes from the scribe's to look at the teapot; he pulled them away from the teapot to stare at the scribe. He shivered again; a great trembling seized him.

Sid Hamed Mortadi, cold now and scarcely able to see the horror-stricken face of his enemy, forced his lips into a crooked smile. He nodded—or tried to nod—but his head was too heavy to lift.

"As—you—suspect." The words came from an almost paralyzed throat. "For—Mohamed—Ali—my—friend—*Allah!*"

The Kaid swayed and fell with his head upon Mortadi's knees. Mortadi slowly crumpled over him—a slave, entering, found the head of the first scribe resting upon the shoulder of Kaid Mashawi, as if they were friends who slept together—as they did.



The Passing of Pete Davila

By

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ORO FINO lay one hundred and twenty miles beyond the end of the railroad. The fast stage, carrying mail, express and passengers, usually made it with two changes of mules, in twelve hours. Freight wagons, bringing in the necessities, jolted over the same route, lucky if the end of a week found them creaking down the long grade into Oro Fino.

Every second morning, barring hold-up or Indian raid, the heavy thorough-brace stage, officered by its driver and the express guard, flourished up to the platform at the railway station and took on the express and passengers that had accumulated during the forty-eight hours since last it left for Oro Fino.

One morning, just as the sun was rising over the pine slopes to the east, the stage wheeled up to the platform to find seven full-grown adults awaiting transportation. The two seats of the Oro Fino stage could accommodate six passengers, three to a seat, sitting face to face, their feet almost together in the flat scow-like bottom.

The driver, as though bestowing a great personal benefaction upon each and every passenger stowed the small satchel allowed each in the baggage rack at the rear. Trunks or heavier luggage could come along on the freight wagons.

"Git in," called the driver, briskly, when the business of stowing the hand-bags was done.

The seven passengers moved toward the vehicle.

"You first." The driver singled out the one feminine customer, although the men already had stood respectfully aside to accord her first choice of seats.

One man stood apart from the rest. He was a short man so stockily built as to seem almost round. Though far behind, out of deference to the lady he held his wide-brimmed slouch hat in his hands; his bullet head set solidly upon a short neck, and his brown face, rotund and smiling, was set with a pair of twinkling black eyes, alert, interested in everything that went on. His hair, black as night, was curly and seemed to stand out all over his head with a jaunty air of having a desire to be off seeking excitement.

One by one the travelers entered the stage until only the curly haired stranger and a brisk little old Irishman remained outside. The Irishman motioned the other to enter.

"Ho, ho, ho," the stocky man laughed out loud at the suggestion. He laughed until the echoes came back from the pines and beat against the little railway station. "Ho, ho, ho. If I'm get inside these wagon she's not got room for somebody else. You ride inside, papa, I'm do better oop on top."

The driver's quick eyes appraised the rotund stranger.

"I don't take chances on any hold-up, with weepons, ridin' on top," he warned. Stepping to the stranger the driver ran a practised hand over the muscular torso.

"Humph," he grunted, gingerly pulling a keen, bone handled knife, such as used by Canadian trappers, from a sheath concealed between the broad shoulder muscles, the handle easily reached, resting at the base of the short neck.

"Humph, I thought as much."

He slammed the door of the stage and tossed the knife to the express guard in the seat, who dropped it into the receptacle where the strong-box was stored. The stocky man grinned good naturedly and climbed to a place over the baggage rack.

The driver scrambled to his seat, pulled down his hat, buckled the strap across his lap, hitched on his gloves and took the lines from the express messenger who held the team. Kicking loose the brake he tightened the lines; the mules started off at a lope, trace chains jingling, shod hoofs clattering on the stony roadway. The stage, rumbling hollowly, lurched behind.

In the front seat of the coach, riding backward, sat a whisky drummer, handsome in a large, florid way, between a raw-boned placer-miner and a stolid, travel-worn gentleman who clapped a strong cigar between his teeth the moment he entered the stage, gripped the seat with both hands, braced his feet, and gave himself up to the inevitable hardship of the journey. Across from these three, a huge, mustached Cornishman sat between the little gray Irishman and the lady.

"What's your line?" The florid whisky drummer turned to the stolid traveler at his right.

"Mine supplies," replied the other, shifting his cigar expertly. Then, as if the specter of endless trips to isolated mining camps suddenly rose before him, he ground the cigar between his teeth. "Mine supplies, —— 'em."

The stage bowled down easy slopes through pine-clad hills. The trail curved through shady nooks, past damp banks of fern and moss; across cool rivulets where crystal water plashed over smooth rocks.

"Lovely country," observed the whisky salesman straightening his diamond tie-pin with a plump hand upon which glowed several larger and more precious stones. He drew a deep breath of the keen mountain air.

The mine supply man snorted. "Huh, this must be your first trip into this blasted hole."

"Yep. But I'm comin' back often now. Headquarters moved to K. C. from St. Louis."

"Umph."

"This your first trip, too?" The whisky salesman scanned the faces of the three in the rear seat and singled out the white-haired little Irishman who, despite his cheap suit, carried a subtle air of authority. His white mustache was close-clipped across a decisive mouth, but his eyes were kindly and benign.

"No, no, me boy," he replied in a thin, high-pitched voice. "Oi've been it manny the time. Oi—uh, work at the Oro Fino mine."

A rasping laugh burst from the raw-boned placer-miner who sat beside the whisky salesman. The weather-beaten miner cracked his knuckles one at a time by pulling each finger separately, and his gaze flickered over the Irishman's face as he laughed delightedly.

The whisky salesman smiled broadly as if he understood whatever elicited the cachinnation of the raw-boned man.

"You work at the Oro Fino, too?" he inquired genially.

"Nope." The raw-boned man clapped his mouth shut in a lipless line, but continued to grin.

"He's a placer-miner," explained the Irishman. "He's got a claim down the gulch from the Oro Fino. A good diggin', all roight."

"Need a whim?" the mine supply salesman spoke instantly, "a one-horse whim? Or some drill steel? Powder, fuse, shovels——"

"Nope." Again the mouth clapped shut.

The whisky drummer looked about interestedly. He moved his gaze from the little Irishman to the lady. When he caught her eye he winked, broadly, opening his mouth to accentuate it.

The lady lifted her chin scornfully and stared out at the scenery, but she sucked her lips, moistened them and let them come to repose red and inviting.

The sixth occupant, the bewhiskered Cornishman whose knotted fingers and bunched shoulders proclaimed him a hard-rock miner, rolled his eyes and peered at the lady from under bushy brows that jutted over his dark eyes like clumps of oak-brush from the stony ledges along the trail. Failing to catch her attention he cleared his throat, took an enormous chew from the dark plug in his pocket, and hitched closer to her.

AN HOUR passed; gradually the pines had thinned, and the foothills, covered with their tangle of oak brush and stunted cedars, grew smaller and more barren with each turn of the trail until a level plain, gray and portentous, spread away, endlessly.

"Oh!" The lady uttered her first oral communication as the stage, bouncing over a stony stretch along the floor of a sand-wash, cleared a boulder as large as a man's body.

The whisky salesman looked at her and grinned. The mine supply man bit his cigar the harder and gripped his seat tighter. The placer-miner looked this way and that, clapped shut his lips and jolted about loose-jointedly, seemingly unmindful of the discomfort. The mild mannered little Irishman beamed upon them all, somehow giving them to understand that he would, if he could, gladly ease the journey for them.

The huge Cornishman reached out a solicitous paw, steadied the lady, and moved closer.

"Rough road," he offered.

Dust sifted and settled like a mantle. The lady flecked at it with slender fingers, dusted it from her shoulders and patted her hair; but finally she gave it up, sitting back braced as best she could against the recurring shocks, her eyes closed tightly. The whisky drummer removed his long, dark coat, unbuttoned his flowered velvet waistcoat, then buttoned it up again. The Cornishman took a drink from a bottle and offered it to the lady who first refused then put her moist red lips to the bottle and drank deeply.

Far to the rear, dwindled to a hazy purple pile, lay the pine-clad mountains of the morning. Far ahead smouldered another heap where, deep in a mighty gash, lay their destination. Close at hand, near the base of a long black mesa that stretched toward them like a finger, awaited the first stage station.

It was a parched *adobe* house flanked by a shelter of poles and boughs within an *adobe*-walled corral where the mules were kept. Treeless, sun-riven and comfortless the stage station was welcomed as a haven of rest by the harried passengers.

A camp lunch, cooked on the ground, was gulped by the travelers while four fresh hard-muscled mules were hooked to the stage and left standing sulkily in the sun awaiting the sound of the driver's boot on the brake. Urged to haste by the driver, the passengers finished their hasty repast and piled back into the stage, each instinctively seeking the same place they had occupied during the morning, and the stocky man, still jovial under the coating of white dust, climbed to the top.

The driver grimly pulled down his hat, lifted the handkerchief that was about his neck so that it covered his mouth, and jarred free the brake. The express messenger, sitting over the strong-box, held a shot-gun across his knees, its middle part wrapped by a gunny sack which he dampened sparingly from his canteen, tempering the sun's heat on the barrel.

Within, the passengers clutched at the supports. The driver, inured to the sun, held the reins in a steady hand, easing the mules where he could and letting them out to a gallop on the stretches. Occasionally he tightened the belt, four inches wide, that held him in his seat.

The road was in the mountains again, but what a difference from those of the morning! Here, barren ridges extended upward and merged into a frowning heap of sheer wall and jutting ledge; scanty vegetation clung to the arid slopes, heat beat into the rock and radiated, seemingly intensified. Down in the gulches dry sand crunched beneath the heavy wheels of the stage.

The drummers took to swearing. The lady's face grew whiter, and the Cornishman fairly oozed perspiration and solicitude for her. With unbuttoned collars, loosened belts, sleeves rolled up and eyes squinted against the white sunlight, the occupants mopped perspiration and longed for an end to the journey. Down a dry, windless cañon the stage careened.

Hidden in a clump of hackberry trees the second stage station stood by a seep that dampened the sand for a space and sank into the dry wash below. A moment's respite, a few gulps of cool water; then with fresh mules straining at the tugs, sweat starting and drying on their flanks and hips, the journey was resumed.

And through it all came down disjointed words and phrases from the three men on top who were conversing as though seated in chairs at home. Principally the voice of the stocky man boomed out, detailing strange happenings in many climes. Now and again his cheery laugh echoed, like some vitally human Santa Claus on the roof of a cabin.

Just as the sun dropped behind the granite ridge, the stage came to a series of downslopes, blasted on the edge of eternity, and increasing in steepness with each turn of the road. On the last long pitch they burst upon Oro Fino.

* * *

NOT much of a town, Oro Fino; a crooked line of saloons, restaurants and general-merchandise stores that followed the course of the gulch through the heart of the town. On both sides rose tier upon tier of houses, each street high enough to look down on the roofs of the one story dwellings below.

Far up along the fringes, reached only by foot-paths, perched the shacks of miners who had large families, or the muckers who did not care where they slept, and peons from Old Mexico who had never known anything better. Not much of a town, Oro Fino, but here were four thousand souls, gold-seekers all; here was water, growing trees, employment, entertainment—and here was gold!

Gold, the magic that brought a town to the heart of a wilderness even against the combined opposition of Indians, outlaws and nature herself; gold, the lodestone that drew men from every part of the world to this frontier.

The stage, dropping down the steep grade, winding between dwellings perched on the hillside, came to a halt at the office of the Oro Fino Mining Company, a two story, cut-rock building, by far the finest business block in the town. Across loomed the Grand Central Hotel, also owned by the mining company. The Grand Central housed the more prosperous transients, and its dining-room was patronized by Oro Fino's élite. This was the financial center of the town.

Alighting from the stage the passengers were given their grips by the driver who handed them out with an air of one daring each and every customer to ask for further favors or complain of the service. The two drummers headed straight for the Grand Central. The raw-boned placer-miner lurched off in the direction of the Green Front Saloon.

The lady stood, daintily, while she hunted an address in a scented letter she carried; then moved off lightly toward Queenie Mack's; the Cornishman followed clumsily with her bag. The stocky stranger still remained seated upon the top of the stage with legs sticking straight out, apparently expecting to go on down to the mule stables before quitting the rig.

The little gray Irishman smiled at the stage driver, nodded cheerily to the express messenger struggling with the heavy box, and went straight across the street into the office building of the Oro Fino mining company.

"Howdy, Jimmie." A cripple, stumping about on a peg-leg sweeping the floors, greeted the little Irishman in a friendly manner, and hurried to open a door marked "Private."

"Well, Berry, how've things been going while Oi'm away?" asked the little gray Irishman as he passed into his office.

"Fine, Jimmie, fine. Everything's just fine."

"Thot's good."

Old Jimmie Mahoney sank into his upholstered desk-chair. The long trip had tired him very much; he sighed comfortably and looked about the room with its fine furnishings. Old Jimmie still remembered the days when, with only a burro, a keg of water, and a rifle he had penetrated the desert and discovered the ledge of the Oro Fino. It had not been easy to turn that prospect hole into a successful mine.

Old Jimmie Mahoney, though kindly and benign, possessed a strain that was canny and alert. He had managed his business with a skilful hand; he wrote his own contracts in words definite enough to hold water in any court of law. The progress of the Oro Fino, from its first gopherings with pick and shovel to a great gold producer, was a steady climb, unmarred by broken promises, litigation, ruined stockholders or labor liens.

Jimmie Mahoney had made the Oro Fino pay its own way and keep straight with the world. He loved his mine and the men who worked in it, and when prosperity had come to him, he was satisfied to continue spending the greater part of his time at Oro Fino, acting as a sort of assistant to his own mine superintendent.

A disturbance in the outer office broke in on old Jimmie's reverie; heavy soles clumped across the hardwood floor. A tall bow-legged man, booted, his hat and shoulders still covered with the yellow dust of the trail, jerked open the door to Jimmy Mahoney's private office and stalked in.

"The skinner drivin' the eight—them with the white leader and the two blue wheelers—well, he's got killed."

"Thot white leader is Bessie, and them blue wheelers is Blue and Smokey," said old Jimmie without exhibiting surprize at the news the muleteer brought. "And the skinner, he's Bill Jason. Ye say he's kilt, eh? What kilt 'im, now?"

"He's shot," replied the other succinctly. "Him and his swamper had been playin' poker down at th' mule barn. They got to fussin'. Then Bill begun stacking the cards, like he does, an' he pulled off some crooked plays. The swamper caught him and shot 'im. Swamper's lit out someplace, by this time, I guess."

"Hum-m-m. Thot's too bad. But Bill, he was a single man and had no fambly; but he was a good skinner. Well, Oi'll rustle another man to take the team. Thanks, fer tellin' me about it."

Miners, off shift, going up through town that night met old Jimmie coming up from the mule corrals where he had been to see that Bill Jason received a proper burial. They shook hands with him as old friends, instead of regarding him as a Midas, the owner of the Oro Fino. Later, the words "Skinner Wanted" appeared, chalked on the blackboard that always stood in front of the offices.

THE first man to enter the mine company's office building the next morning was the owner of the mine. At six-thirty Jimmie Mahoney had dutifully made his way from his room at the Grand Central across to his office. He sat a long time in his desk-chair, his eyes on the steep trail winding down into Oro Fino from the world beyond. A belated skinner was coming down after an all-night drive, his eight slouching along in the harness, ears wagging tiredly. The skinner and his swamper were perched on the brake ratchets, easing the two mighty wagons down the steep grade.

Three men had gathered in the outer office. One was a straight-backed, athletic youngster of about twenty-five, a bit hard of face but of evident strength and agility. The second man lounged in the office rocker; he held no visible promise of making a good skinner, Jimmie decided, for his face was weak and his manner indolent. The third was the stocky, black haired man who had come on top of the stage. He was relating to the others a fearsome experience when a bear had stampeded his team.

"An' when we cam' to the las' turn," he was saying, "I'm see where I can't mak' heem—we was gone so fas'. Oh, by golly, I'm joost 'bout joomp an' let her go to ——, when, by golly, you won' believe me, those leader she's fell down. Ho, ho, ho!"

His laugh filled the room and rattled the windows.

"Ho, ho! those mules she's fell down flat an' the rest pile oop on top of heem. They's run so far they lay lak dead. Thas give my brake a chance an' before the tongue broke off I'm got her 'bout stop. The trailer boomp into me because the swamper he's fell off 'way back some place.

"But I'm get those mules up an' feex the tongue an' go on down to camp. Oh, by golly, I'm do lak that lots of tam. I'm remember one tam oop in the beeg woods, at lumber camp——"

Old Jimmie temporarily quieted the reminiscence by calling in the youth.

"What's your name?" Jimmie began at once.

"Cleve Conley."

"Are ye a skinner?"

"I am."

"And do ye think ye could tackle this long road with only a swamper to help ye," smiled Jimmie, "and eight tough mules to drive?"

"I can if anybody can," declared young Conley positively.

"Ye know some of our loads are pretty valuable to the mine company. And if a skinner lets all the weight suddent loike onto one wheel, she'll pile up."

Fixing the youth with his mild blue eye Old Jimmie propounded another question. "Do ye ever break out a wagon tongue?"

"No. I always see to it my wagons have good tongues before I start."

"Oh, I see. Good. And did ye ever run off the bank and tip over?"

"No. I keep my wagons on the road."

"Thot's foine. Now, do ye ever have a load go slippin', say back on the trailer, and the whole thing fall off? Something heavy, loike mining machinery, that ye couldn't get back on again?"

"Nope. I get off and look over my chains now and then. I keep the load in place so it won't slip."

"Ye do thot, now! Thot's very good. Now suppose ye've got yer mules in a corral and they're hard to catch?"

"I'd rope 'em," Conley explained. "I worked as a cowboy for awhile and I'm good with the rope. I snap 'em up without losing any time. That's the easiest way—rope 'em."

"Thot's all just now, me boy," Jimmie arose. "Just step back in the other room and wait till Oi've questioned those other two skinners."

The languid applicant was next.

"Yer name's Partlow, isn't it?" Jimmie began briskly.

The would-be skinner nodded.

"Yeh," he intoned.

His reply was spiritless, as though the effort of speech wearied him.

"And ye're employed as mucker in the mine?"

"Yeh."

"Don't ye loike the job?"

"Yeh, but——"

"But what?"

Partlow's eyes roved about the room.

"I reckoned this mule skinnin' 'ud pay more."

"So it does, but it's a responsible position with lots of hard labor. Did ye ever drive mules, Partlow?"

"Yeh, lots."

"Think ye could tackle this road with only a swamper to help ye?"

"Yeh, easy."

"This road is terrible rough. Tell me, did ye ever break the tongue out of a wagon in yer teamin'?"

"No, sir."

"Thot's good. Did ye ever tip a load over?"

"No."

"Or did ye ever have a load go slidin' and the whole thing fall off before ye knowed of it?"

"No."

"And how do ye catch yer mules if they're wild and in an open corral?"

Partlow thought a moment.

"I wouldn't turn 'em loose," he decided. "I'd tie 'em up and leave 'em tied." He sighed and settled in his chair as if the very thought of trying to catch mules fatigued him.

"Well, ye step into the other room and wait till Oi've questioned the other felly. Oi'll let ye know in a minute. And if Oi can't use ye on this freightin' job, ye can still stay with the mine, ye know," Jimmy added kindly.

"Yeh, all right."

The round face of the short man appeared in the doorway the instant Partlow's figure slouched through. He waited, hat in hand, his face wreathed in a smile, awaiting recognition. At Jimmie's nod he strode into the room and stood before the desk, legs wide apart and his short arms akimbo.

Old Jimmie noticed that the man's short nose had been knocked over and set aslant on his face. It did not harden the expression, but rather added to the humorous quality, like the grotesque features a clown paints on his face.

"What's your name, man?"

"Pete Davila."

"Did ye ever drive freight team?"

"Ho, ho, ho!" Pete Davila's eyes danced merrily. "Ho, sure I'm drive freight team. I'm drive any ol' kind—oxen, hosses, burros, mules—any kin' freight team what can be hook oop. Ho, one tam oop in Canada I'm freightin' wheat an' she cam beeg rain an' I'm got six mule. Well, I'm go get six hosses an' hook 'em on in front, but still was stuck; then I'm go get six oxes——"

"Just a moment," interrupted Jimmie. "Do ye think ye could tackle this road of ours, with but a swamper to help ye?"

Pete Davila's eyes took on a serious expression, his short arms dropped to his side and hung inert as he wrestled with the question.

"We-e-el," he began slowly. "Mebby so, an' mebby no. You know it's depend on what kind stuff I'm haulin'. Mebby sometam I'm got on iron or lumber, or mebby these team ron' 'way or somethin'—I'm mak' 'em all right, if I'm don't have some hard luck."

"And your teams sometimes run away?"

"Ho, ho! Sure. Lots of tam I'm do that. Why, I'm work for the Saginaw Lumber Comp'ny—wan beeg lumber comp'ny—an' my load logs she fall off an' hit my wheelers in the behin' an', by golly, how we gone. We run all the way from camp to headquarter, an' I'm fall off 'way back at the first bend. The boss he say——"

Jimmie's upraised hand stopped the flood of words.

"Ye say yer load fell off. Now do ye sometimes have a load go slippin' and fall off unbeknownst to ye?"

"Sure. Ho, ho, ho!" Pete Davila's eyes sparkled as he laughed. "Lots of tam. I'm loose a load off my trailer wan tam an' am gone on t'ree, four mile before I'm fin' heem out. 'Nother tam——"

"And do ye sometimes break the tongue out? Or run off the grade and tip over?"

"Ho, ho ho!" Pete Davila threw back his head and fairly roared with merriment. He nearly choked. He turned clear around in his tracks, his whole body shaking with laughter.

"S-sure," he sputtered. "Broke out tongue; tip over; broke the wheel all to smash— Ho, I'm bust brake off an' pile oop in the road. By golly, one tam down in Mexico I'm stuck in queek-sand. The river he's rise oop, queek, an' I'm joost tam for cut my team loose an' get out. The whole load, wagons an' all, she's gone to ——. She's roll down the river in the queek-sand an' nobody ever seen wan leetle board of her again."

"My, my, what a terrible loss." Jimmie's smile belied the doleful words. "And now mebby ye can tell me how ye'd catch yer mules, if they was wild and in an open corral?"

"Uh—uh—what? Pete Davila's face contracted in strained attention and the furrow between his eyes deepened. "What? We don't drive broncho mules on these road, do we?"

"Well, no, of course not. But there's some that's hard to catch."

"Ho." Pete's serious countenance broke into a smile of understanding. "Some old freight mules that's been spoiled, eh? Or got sore neck and shoulders, hey?"

"Yes, thot sort."

"Ho, ho, ho!" Pete was on familiar ground now. "I'm feex heem. Them ol' spoiled mule. I'm tak a neck-yoke in wan hand and my tie rope in the other; if he don't stan' still I'm give 'im the neck-yoke. By golly, 'bout the tam I'm swat heem two, t'ree tam with wan neck-yoke he's stan' lak a sheep while I put on the rope.

"Some tam I'm use the black snake, but I'm lak the neck-yoke better, he's mak those mule mind, all right. Wan tam down in Georgia I'm haul out railroad ties. I'm drive three mule an' wan beeg ol' hoss. One them mule fight me every tam I go put the bridle on. He's got afraid for his ears, you know. Well, I'm tak that neck-yoke an' pretty soon he's stan' lak a burro——"

"Yes, yes, I know," broke in Old Jimmie, "ye're hired. Go down to the barn an' take the team, there's plenty wagons there. Ye'll load and unload yerself." Jimmy stepped to the door. "Cleve Conley," he called.

The young man came into the room.

"Mister Conley," Jimmie began. "How'd ye loike to go along as swamper fer Pete Davila, here?"

"What's the pay?"

"Half what the skinner gets."

"Umph," grunted the young man scornfully. "And I put in just as many hours and do just about the same work."

"Yes, I know," argued Jimmie kindly. "But the skinner has the responsibility. It's a dangerous job; ye need more experience before ye're a full-fledged skinner, young felly. Ye can have the swamper job if ye want it."

"All right," Conley nodded shortly, "I'll take it."

PETE DAVILA was two days late in making his first trip. When finally his long team of mules wound down the grade and pulled up at the company's warehouse Old Jimmie Mahoney saw it coming and went down to visit, and to find out if anything was wrong. He found Pete Davila and Cleve Conley unloading the wagons.

"Joost drive heem too slow," explained Pete good naturedly. "I'm go faster next tam. These one good team mules."

But the story got out. The stage driver was the one who brought it to Jimmie.

"Twenty miles this side of th' railroad," the stage driver told Jimmie, "I passed them. Both front wheels was off th' trailer and she was broke in the middle where she dropped. I know what was th' matter, all right; that Conley kid what's swampin' for Davila had greased th' wagons and somehow forgot to put th' burrs back on th' axles.

"I'd stopped my team at Pine Spring fer a drink an, seen both them nuts lyin' on a rock where the kid had done his greasin'. Now mebby Conley was jealous of Davila's job, er mebby he's just careless like any kid. Anyhow it made Davila a lot of extry work.

I stopped to help' em, but Davila wouldn't hang the blame on the kid. He admitted the kid had greased th' wagons, but he acted like a little thing like leavin' off the nuts was common.

" 'Ho, ho, ho,' he laughed in that noisy way he's got, 'Ho, I'm do lak that lots of tam;' he said, like he does, an he took his big wheelers back to th' station an brung out another trailer. Him and th' Conley kid threw th' load on an come on."

Jimmie Mahoney, always eager to find what sort of stuff was down inside a man, cornered Pete Davila on his next trip to the mine.

"And why didn't ye fire thot kid and git a new swamper on the spot?" Jimmie demanded with a show of asperity. "——, man, ye know we can't afford to bust up wagons thot way. It costs the comp'ny money."

"Ho, ho, ho!" Pete laughed in a conciliatory tone, "Thees keed; they all make mistak'. He's all right. I'm show heem lots thing 'bout thees freightin' job. Pretty soon he'll mak' one —— good skinner, by golly, I'm tell you."

"There must be good stuff down inside thot fat ——," mused Old Jimmie as he made his way back to his office. "He knew thot kid did it a-purpose to make it tough on 'im what got the job he wanted. But Davila sure played square with the young felly, he did, fer a fact."

As Pete Davila and his young swamper got the mules under way on the long journey back to the railway station for their third trip a deputy sheriff, detailed to look into the late shooting of Bill Jason, looked long and hard at Davila; he let his eyes follow the man's figure as long as anything could be seen of the outfit toiling off up the long grade, bound out of Oro Fino. Giving up the vigil for the slayer of Bill Jason, the deputy got his horse from the barn, saddled hastily, and rode off toward the south, bound for the county seat, two hundred miles away.

Ten days later three men, dressed as cowboys, each with a six-shooter at his hip and a carbine on his saddle, came into Oro Fino from the south. They rode straight to the superintendent's office. Dismounting, they left their tired horses standing, reins down, in the street and trailed their spurs into the board-floored office.

"We'd like to know if you've got a man working here," the leader began when they stood before Jimmie Mahoney in his office, "by the name of Pete Saar, or French Mike, or Pedro Dupré—that's his right name. He's a heavy-built, sawed-off jasper with black hair that's curly and sticks out all over his head like a crow's nest. We got trace of him being in this state more'n a month ago, north of here, and this feller—" the speaker indicated the deputy—"seen him workin' for you, teamin'."

He finished, and the three officers stood eying old Jimmie as though expecting him to deny ever having seen such a man.

"Hm-m-m," Old Jimmie's thought instantly of Pete Davila. There was no mistaking the description. "Well, there may be such a felly workin' here," he admitted, "but first Oi'd loike to know who ye are, and what has this man done?"

"I'm the sheriff of this county," replied the leader, and this is one of my deputies; the other feller is an officer from the state of Floridy. We have the necessary papers and authority to take this skinner of yourn back, him bein' charged with both murder and an escape from the penitentiary."

"Is thot so," jeered old Jimmie. "And it takes the three of ye to arrest 'im, does it? He must be a turrible bad man, and me mistakin' 'im all along fer a moighty good-natured mule skinner."

"He is a bad man," volunteered the officer from Florida. "He comes from a bad family; we've traced his relatives—they're all bad. His real name is Pedro Dupré, his father was part Spanish, but a Canadian, and his mother was Canuck French. A bad lot they were, too. This man first got in trouble when a saloon-keeper, who did not allow negroes in his place attempted to put him out, insisting that he was a mulatto. The fight that followed developed into a general mêlée—all of the men were drunk—and this Pedro Dupré killed the saloon-keeper with a blow from his fist. He was sentenced to seven years in the State penitentiary. Being a teamster, he was put to doing hauling. One noon he witnessed a young prisoner being whipped by a guard—a perfectly proper proceeding—but this teamster ordered the guard to stop, and when the whipping went on, he killed the guard with a neck-yoke. He then made his escape, though hit as least twice by rifle shots from the other guards. He got away, but the wounds will be additional proof of his identity. There is a reward of one thousand dollars."

"But the man has good stuff in him. Oi know thot," insisted Jimmie. "Oi hope my skinner isn't the man. He'll be back in a day or two. 'Tis just as well ye wait for 'im here—no one will warn 'im if ye keep yer mouths shut. He'll come in with his team."

THE hours that followed found Old Jimmie strangely depressed. He went about his work woodenly, his mind always returning to Pete Davila who had played fair with the young swamper, who would have done him out of his job on that first trip. Granted he had been a bad one, wasn't there always the possibility of his having realized the error of his past and might he not be striving to start anew in this wilderness where none know him?

"What if he did kill a bar-keeper," argued Old Jimmie to himself. " 'Twas in a fair fight. And if he broke a guard's skull with a neck-yoke 'twas from a decent instinct to save a lad from a brutal beating."

Old Jimmie gave Pete Davila the benefit of every doubt. But like a dark cloud the presence of the officers depressed him. It seemed to confirm a suspicion that had been lurking in Old Jimmie's mind. He remembered the knife that the stage driver had taken from Pete Davila on the first morning.

On the night the whisky salesman had returned to the railway station from his stay at Oro Fino, he had been held up at the point of a revolver as he waited on the unlighted station platform for his train. The hold-up had taken every cent of money the salesman carried, and relieved him of his diamonds.

Old Jimmie was the first to learn of the robbery. He paid the salesman for his loss and advised him to mention it to no one; while Old Jimmie, himself, put the occurrence down with numerous other such happenings that time alone could adjust.

Time had not yet laid the blame for the hold-up at any certain door, but in the light of the deputies' statement Old Jimmie began to wonder if, after all, Pete Davila was the culprit. Pete had been in Oro Fino at the time. None knew him and his movements had been unnoticed. Possibly, born bad as he had been, the salesman's diamonds had found their way into his pockets.

Old Jimmie dreaded to find out the truth. But the more he pondered the evidence the more strongly he came to believe Pete Davila must be the man the officers wanted. Jimmie's eyes sought the steep grade down which the long team would come, bringing the wagons and the swamper and Pete Davila.

Late the next afternoon Jimmie Mahoney glanced up at the road. His heart sank. For there, in full sight, was the outfit, Pete Davila's familiar broad figure standing on the forward brake and the swamper upon the trailer. Jimmie could almost hear the shriek of the brakes as they held back the load. The mules swung along ahead, traces dangling, the fif-chain dragging idly in the dust, making a long sinuous trail in the middle of the road.

Jimmie Mahoney looked on, his heart sick with dread at the fate that surely awaited Pete Davila. He could almost see the shadow of the gallows that would snuff out the life of the man who had killed the prison guard with a neck-yoke. As he watched, he saw the lead wagon give a sudden lurch ahead; a leap that brought it square against the sleek haunches of the wheelers.

In a scurry of dust, flung up by rough-shod hoofs, the wheelers threw up their heads and jumped forward; their movement and the menacing rush of the wagon startled the six other mules and they swung into a trot. The fif-chain tightened with a jerk that fairly hurled the trailer ahead.

Cleve Conley, the swamper, standing on the ratchet of the trailer, his weight against the brake-lever, was shaken from his footing. He clung a second to the lever, attempting to regain his place on the smooth iron ratchet, and then losing his grip as the heavy wagon jarred over a stone, he twisted aside and went sprawling from the wagon to scramble to safety on the soft gravel along the outer rim of the embankment.

The trailer, held back by the brake as long as the swamper had held his place, was released and shot forward, jolting into the lead wagon.

Jimmie Mahoney, rigid by his window, saw Pete Davila slam on the useless brake of the lead wagon. The fact that the brake lever slid clear to the front of the ratchet without slackening the wagon's rush told Old Jimmie's experienced eyes that one of the cross-bolts, upon which the whole action of the brake depended, had broken off, cut in two by the strain.

The eight mules were going at a gallop now, straight down-hill, the wagons careening behind.

"Sure, an' he ain't goin' to stay with it!" gasped Old Jimmie in a horrified tone as he saw Pete Davila, still in his place, fumbling with the reins on the wheelers and pointers and the leader's single cotton line.

"Jump, man! Jump!" shouted Jimmie, leaping from his chair and bending out at the window. His knuckles grew white where they gripped the sill. "Jump, man! To —— with the team and wagons. Jump. Save yourself— Ah!"

In the middle of the road, now scarcely fifty yards ahead of the plunging team, two small atoms of humanity played in the dust. They were children of a miner and, with their toys and little red wagon, were imitating the freight wagons they had seen so often passing their home on the steep hillside.

One tot was in the wagon and the other, braced against the pull with his back to the oncoming danger hurtling down upon them, was gently backing the little fellow down the slope. Jimmie could see a string of shining cans, linked together, that the larger child was dragging behind him. The roar of the wagons was distinct. Old Jimmie wondered that the child did not take warning and flee.

And then he saw that the bank on one side of the child was far higher than its head, and the other side sloped off steeply to the gorge below. The little fellow was hurrying with his wagon and its precious burden to the little path that turned out of the main road far below. This path led to their home, and over it they were accustomed to go and come when the big wagons went by. But Jimmie could see that this time, the path was far too distant. The wagons were almost upon the tots.

Pete Davila still retained his place on the lead wagon. There had been plenty of time to clamber off the wagon and drop in comparative safety from the brake. But Pete Davila clung to his perch, his foot still on the useless brake. He had the lines in hand now and, reaching up on the leader's line, he gave it first a jerk and then a steady pull. The wise leader, the smartest in the team, swung out to the edge of the road.

The pair just behind them, having only their snap-chains attached to the fif-chain to guide them, attempted to stay in the road, but the pull of the leaders hauled them over. The pointers, obeying the driver's iron pull on the reins leaped the chain, as they had been taught to do, and swung out. Pete Davila then hauled the wheelers, their mouths wide open, out after the pointers. As they turned out the tongue cramped the front wheels.

It was all done in a second. The leaders were off the road, and the pair behind them were on the edge; the pointers and wheelers, floundering in the loose gravel of the embankment were jerked down as, with a crash of rending hickory, one front wheel jammed under the wagon and the other, the forward one, collapsed at the hub.

The leading wagon rolled over in the road; the trailer, its short tongue broken off at the coupling, gouged into the wreckage and caromed into the inner bank where it lodged, its wheels half-buried in falling rock and soil loosened by the impact. A billow of yellow dust rose from the pile and drifted off on the hot breeze. Fitful spurts shot up as the mules struggled free from the harness and, one by one, got to their feet and stood quivering with fright along the edge of the road.

The little fellow managing the tiny wagon reached his path. Compelling his passenger to alight he managed to shove the toy wagon out of the road and pull the string of bright cans in after it. There the two tots stood, their small faces turned expectantly, waiting for the wagons to pass.

Miners off shift, and their wives, rushed out from the houses perched upon the slope. From below came Jimmie Mahoney, running, bringing the company doctor. Before Old Jimmie and the doctor reached the wreckage willing hands were heaving at it, prying up the broken boards of the wagon, dragging aside the cargo, and digging at the stony earth to release from beneath it Pete Davila.

MANY had witnessed the heroic act, and there was no lack of hands to carry Pete Davila to the nearest home and lay him upon a cot.

"There's loife in 'im yet," Old Jimmie Mahoney was bending over the thick, still form. "He's not dead yet."

"That's him," snapped the officer from Florida, triumphantly. "That's my man."

"Git out!" Old Jimmie raised two

clenched hands, a menacing fire gleaming from his blue eyes. "Git out. Git!"

The curly black head tossed on the cot. Kindly hands tore open his shirt and cold water was sprinkled on the crushed chest. The dark eyes opened and the clear light of sanity showed in them; the humorous mouth framed a smile.

"Ho," he breathed, almost inaudibly. "Ho, I'm do lak that—lots—tam."

The eyes closed and the bruised muscles relaxed tiredly.

Old Jimmie's eyes were fixed on the freshly-healed bullet wound that formed a jagged, angry scar across the thick ribs. He pulled a sheet over the racked torso.

"Git out, everybody," he ordered. "Git out—everybody but the doctor."

Old Jimmie turned excitedly to the doctor.

"Doc," he whispered, "will he live? Tell me, is there a chanct to save 'im? Will he live?"

"Well, there's no reason why he shouldn't. Men with health and a physique like that don't die off very easily. He's got a few ribs smashed in, a broken arm or two; one knee there looks pretty bad, but I guess there's no more chance for internal injuries than there would be of crushing in a beer-keg in a little tumble like that."

"Then, Doc, you go to the door and tell 'em—tell every mother's son of 'em—that this man is dead. Dead! I tell ye. Go tell 'em thot, they'll believe ye when there's some out there what wouldn't put much stock in it if 'twas me sayin' it."

Pete Davila's eyes again opened. He looked into Old Jimmie's face.

"Reach down my back," Davila begged, weakly, "they're—there. I'm mean for bring heem—to you thees trip. Me, I'm sorry."

With gentle fingers Old Jimmie pulled out a soft leather bag that had replaced the knife sheath once worn on the broad back. Opening the draw-strings Jimmie tumbled out the diamonds that had been taken from the whisky drummer.

Pete Davila was watching him with sober eyes.

"I'm mean for bring heem to you. I'm don' want theeng lak' that any more."

"Sh-h-h-h," whispered Old Jimmie. "Shut up. Ye're dead."

Going outside Jimmie bared his head to simulate respect for the deceased and made his way reverently to his office. There he sent for the three officers to come to him immediately.

"Me boys," Jimmie began in heavy tones when the three deputies stood before him. "Ye've come here after a very bad man. Ye've told me there is a reward out for 'im—one thousand dollars, dead or alive, ye said. Now, me boys, the man is dead—Pete Davila is dead. Ye can't git him anywheres in thot shape, so to square ye Oi'm payin' ye the reward."

Old Jimmie counted out one thousand dollars in gold.

"Take it, and git out of camp immediately. This is my town, Oi own every stick of timber in it, and if ye're not gone in foive minutes Oi'll have yez tarred and feathered and run out on a rail. Oi've fed yer horses two days now, and thot's an end to it."

Old Jimmie Mahoney watched the street until he saw the three officers ride out of town and take the dim trail to the south. Going into another room he wheeled the timekeeper's heavy book about on the desk. Searching down the pay roll until he came to the name of Pete Davila he marked it out with a broad ink mark.

"There, now," he said decisively. "Thot tough devil, Pete Davila is no longer a mule skinner in my employ." He extended the inky line clear through to the end of the line. "Pete Davila is dead, dead as the Beegum of Bunglore."

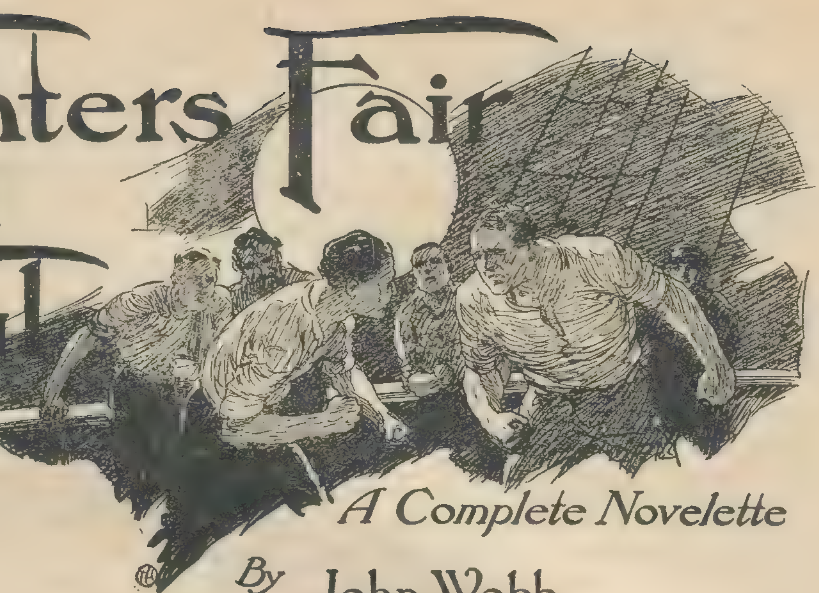
Moistening his thumb Old Jimmie turned the pages until he came to a fresh, unused one. At the top of this he wrote in a firm hand:

> Patrick O'Shea, in charge of all freighting and transportation. His wages is whatever he wants to draw whenever he wants it.

"Now then," he said to himself, "thot fat scoundrel's got a real name. Oi've got him here, and here he's going to stay. Pete Saar, French Mike, Pedro Dupré, Pete Davila—ye're all gone. Ye're all dead, and in yer place is a new man entirely, with a man's name. Oi'll keep this Patrick O'Shea if Oi've got to hold thot murder charge over his head to do it. He risked his loife to save two kids—two sticky little brats he'd niver know the names of. He could have just as well jumped, but he stayed with his team and saved the kids.

"Ah, thot felly's got good stuff in 'im," said Old Jimmie piously, "good stuff, down where it'd ought to be—deep inside of him."

Fighters Fair and Foul



A Complete Novelette

By John Webb

Author of "Eight Seconds," "Henri II," etc.

WHENEVER Captain McGuire's ship, the freighter *Hawk*, was in Port-au-Prince, the fighting little shipmaster was sure to call on Shang Toy, the Chinese merchant; and just as surely the old Chinaman would be waiting in the room back of his curio shop, sitting crosslegged upon a mat, garbed in loose black silk trousers and embroidered green-and-yellow silk blouse.

Shang Toy was a true gentleman; calm, dignified, honorable, courteous, he was not only a gentleman but also the descendant of gentlemen, thirty centuries of them. Perhaps "Shang Toy" wasn't really his name; he had been called that by some one years before when he first came to Port-au-Prince, and he had accepted it as a matter of courtesy and had forthwith had "Shang Toy" painted in neat letters on the front of his store. He was old, even then; and what mattered the correctness of a name to an old, old man who was already standing in the doorway that opened upon the Black Country? Soon the carved teakwood coffin that he had kept so carefully these many years would be filled, and the clay that had been "Old Shang" would be sent to China, to be buried with those honorable ancestors who had gone on before.

He sat now in his little room with its bronze images, its carved statues, its fine embroideries and silken brocades—a room that smelled of chandoe and aloewood and was heavy with the warm fragrance of China. A carved stand at his side held a long, black-stemmed pipe with a green jade mouthpiece, and two glasses of rice whisky cut with Bourbon and flavored with aniseed and powdered ginger.

It was now nearly one o'clock; the *Hawk* was to have docked at twelve, and soon the little shipmaster, Shang Toy's "good and honorable friend," would be along to pay his respects. Usually they discussed West Indian politics; the rise or fall of Hatian dyewood in the American market; the price of long- and short-staple cotton, or of coffee, or sugar; but this time there was a matter of local and immediate importance to be gone into. Shang Toy was contemplating embarking on an unusual business venture, but before doing so he would consult his little friend, Captain "Mac."

A slender Chinese youth entered the room, his rope-soled sandals slapping softly on the woven straw floor covering.

"Is my friend the little ship captain on his way here?" asked Shang Toy without glancing up.

The youth answered at length in the Chinese language.

"Even now he is about to enter," he ended, bowing low.

He retreated, but a moment later reappeared in the doorway and held aside the light draperies for the old Chinaman's guest.

Shang Toy arose and took the captain's outstretched hand.

"You had a pleasant voyage down?" he inquired in finely modulated English.

Captain Mac slowly shook his head. He handed his floppy Montecristi hat to Moy, and seated himself in the low wicker rocker that the youth slid forward. Shang Toy sank upon his mat and clasped his withered old hands in his lap.

"Not so pleasant," said Captain Mac. "Engine trouble. Wound up by blowing out a cylinder head and smashing a crank shaft when we anchored. Engineer on watch backed too hard. We can't resume the voyage till we make repairs, and we can't start repairs till we get new parts from New York. I cabled as soon as I got ashore, but the next ship out of New York for Port-au-Prince will not arrive for ten or twelve days, and it will take us at least two days to make repairs after we get the parts; that means we'll be laid up here for about two weeks."

Shang Toy made a clucking noise with his tongue.

"Too bad!" he said. "Too bad! Bad for your ship and bad for your company—but good for me. For I shall have your company. We shall have wonderful talks. We will ferret out all the mistakes and troubles of the world and evolve a solution for each one. Eh, my friend?"

Merely a puckering of the network of wrinkles about his eyes showed that he was smiling.

"Also," he went on, "I would have your advice on a certain matter of business—and ethics."

"Gladly;" Captain Mac nodded.

"Of course!"

Shang Toy meditated for some seconds.

"Yes, it is a matter of ethics," he said at last in a mellow, thoughtful voice. "Though if I find it also profitable, so much the better!"

"Tell me about it."

"Yes. We have had exciting times in Port-au-Prince. We have had much fighting, fierce fighting. There is a little war going on, and the little war is growing. The gendarmerie is worried, but helpless. There is nothing they can put their hands on, you see. They arrest a disturber and take him to court—and no one shows up to make a complaint. All combatants refuse to appear against their opponents. It is a private war, they say, and they seem determined to fight it to a finish in their own way. All's fair, they say, and the spoils to the victor."

"And where do you come in?" asked Captain Mac.

"The sinews of war." Shang Toy's wrinkles puckered as he smiled his peculiar smile. "I, my friend, am the sinews of war. I represent money; and one side is in dire need of money at the present stage of the battle. I am meditating taking sides. Perhaps I should do better to keep out, but there is a young man——"

He shrugged and smiled again.

"You think this young man needs help. Is that it?"

"Yes—though he would not admit it. It is certain that money would give him a fighting chance; without it he is sure to lose—though he wouldn't admit that either. He is a determined young man. His name is Woods — Larry Woods. His partner is George Bronson. Bronson and Woods have an equity in the schooner *Carib;* the mortgage, a heavy one, is held by an Englishman who lives in Cape Haitien, and the Englishman is threatening to call in his loan. I do not blame him; he is a poor business man or he would have done so long ago.

"It is a cargo war. Woods and Bronson are fighting Tom Carney, who has two schooners to their one. He had one schooner on the south coast and one on the north coast; the *Carib* is competing against them on the north. Carney's schooner on the north coast is the *Scorpion*, and he sails her himself.

"You and I have often discussed the opportunity there is in Haiti for a good 'feeder' or two. Port-au-Prince is the real port of call for the regular passenger and freight ships, and they do not find it profitable to make the smaller ports, such as Jacmel, Aux Cayes and Jeremie in the south; or St. Marc, St. Nicholas, Gonaives and Cape Haitien in the north. They are hard for big ships to get into; the harbor facilities are poor, and the cargoes are seldom large enough to make it pay. Thus there was a good chance for a feeder or two, to pick up cargoes here and there for transhipment at Port-au-Prince.

"The McClone brothers were here first, on the south coast; but they don't count, because they are really planters and exporters, and seldom carry cargoes other than their own. Then came Woods and Bronson with the *Carib;* Woods is master and Bronson is solicitor. They were doing nicely when Carney came along with the *Scorpion* and the *Salamander*. There was room and cargoes for all three schooners, but—one night the *Scorpion* caught on fire! The fire didn't amount to much because they caught it in time; but Carney's solicitor, a man named Scofield, blamed it on Woods, and Carney believed him. That started the war! Since then there's been nothing but fight. They fight for cargoes, for anchorage room, for supplies and for anything else that will offer an excuse."

Moy entered, bowed low and rattled off something in Chinese.

"In a minute," answered Shang Toy in English; and Moy withdrew.

"I had nothing at all to do with the trouble. I heard about it, of course, and heard a dozen different versions of it; but I kept within my little shop and said nothing." He smiled shrewdly. "I heard that Woods and Bronson were losing; that they were short of money and the mortgage was due; that Carney was being backed and subsidized by a certain American steamship company; and everybody said it was only a question of a month or so before the *Carib* would be seized and sold at auction. That, of course, would end the fight. Still I did not think of interfering. I saw no reason why I should. It seemed, judging by the stories I heard, that Woods and Bronson were being justly served for using foul tactics—in the beginning, I mean; they are both using them freely now.

"Then one day a young man came in here to buy a coconut-fiber scarf—I am the only dealer in Haiti who sells them. He said he wanted it for his mother back in the States. It was Woods. I had never met him before. We talked; not much—just a few casual words. I looked into his eyes; and I knew right then that he had not done the things they said. He never set fire to a ship. He is an honorable young man."

He looked blandly up at Captain Mac and smiled.

"I decided that I should like to help this young man Woods."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because I am a Chinaman. I never forget that! You Occidentals say that you can not understand the Chinese, but it seems to not occur to you that you are just as incomprehensible to us. I always keep that in mind; and for that reason I was afraid of making a mistake. It isn't the money—I have more money than a man my age has a right to have—but I like to be on the right side. My ancestors were all honorable men, and I too am an honorable man."

He said it simply, as a matter of fact, and his wrinkled old face was as expressionless as that of the bronze Buddha on a shelf at the end of the room. He took from the stand one of the glasses of rice whisky, handed it to the little captain, took the other himself.

"So I hesitated," he went on. "I do not want to see this young man lose, if he is honest, after a brave fight; neither do I want to put my money to bad use. That is all. I trust you, know that you are honorable; I leave the decision to you. With the money I will lend him he will have almost an even chance to win; without it he is surely lost."

"But I can't decide for you," protested Captain Mac; "I never met the man."

"No; but I sent for him, and he is waiting in the shop."

He clapped his hands.

THE draperies parted, and Moy held them aside as a tall, broad-shouldered young man stepped into the room. The newcomer's left arm was in a sling; there was a partly healed cut on one cheek and a purple lump beneath one eye. He came forward, holding out his hand to Shang Toy, on his face a cheerful grin.

The young man's slight bow and respectful attitude as he greeted old Shang, did not escape the sharp eyes of Captain Mac; and the little shipmaster instantly decided that Larry Woods had breeding and perception if nothing else.

"Captain John McGuire—Captain Larry Woods," murmured Shang Toy, introducing them.

They shook hands.

"Captain Mac has long been a friend of mine—" began Shang Toy; but he paused as Larry Woods started in surprize.

"Captain Mac! You don't mean to say

that this is 'One-Two Mac,' the—the ——"

"The bucko?" offered the captain.

"Well—they—they——"

The tall young man was flustered.

"They do call you a bucko," he said desperately.

"I know they do," said Captain Mac, smiling with a slight twist of his thin lips. "Those stories get around; and they grow—and grow!"

"One-Two Mac!" Larry Woods shook his head in wonderment. "Why I always kind of thought that One-Two Mac was a—a——"

"A big, bearded ruffian with a broken nose, scars all over his face and tattoo marks sticking out over his collar, eh?"

Larry laughed.

"Well, to be frank, Cap'n, I think I did picture him as something like that. But you—why, you're a little man; your head comes barely to my chin! Er—you don't mind the way I'm sizing you up, Cap'n?"

"Help yourself," answered the little man; though there was a slight tinge of annoyance on his lean, brown face as he turned away.

Larry Woods saw a figure that at first glance seemed too boyish and slight to belong to a fighting man; but as his gaze became more comprehensive he saw that the shoulders were deceptively broad and the arms unusually long. The little man's neck was short and his chest deep and broad; it was the narrow hips and waist that gave the impression of frailty.

Larry saw, too, that the hands were peculiarly large-knuckled, and that the knuckles were crisscrossed with many small scars. Those hands fascinated him; for he knew they were the most famous fighting hands on the Western Ocean. So this was One-Two Mac, the bucko! This black-haired, black-eyed, lean-cheeked, slender little fellow who came barely to his chin; this middle-aged sea captain with the embarrassed look on his brown face!

"Pardon me, Cap'n," said Larry at length, "but I'm something of a battler myself—at least I thought I was—and I'm wondering how you do it."

Captain Mac shrugged and lifted his eyebrows.

"What do you mean by saying you *thought* you were a fighter?" he asked, shifting the conversation to get it off himself.

"Well, I thought I could take care of myself; but this morning at two o'clock as I hauled the *Carib* into the dock after picking up a load of freight at St. Marc, I ran into Tom Carney, my—er—competitor. He knocked me down, picked me up and knocked me down again. I think he would still be picking me up and knocking me down if three gendarmes hadn't come running down from the gate and put an end to it. I've come to the conclusion that I don't know the slightest thing about fighting."

His chin suddenly squared and hardened. "But I'm going to learn!" he ripped out.

"Did you stand up to him?" asked the captain, his somber eyes searching the other's face.

"As best I could. And as long as I could. I've done a lot of fighting—I like it; I had never been licked till I met Tom Carney at two this morning; and I fought harder and better this morning than I ever fought before in my life. But he handled me like I was a small boy. I didn't have a chance in the world, and I knew it after the first few seconds. *Slam, bang,* and I was down. I got up—*slam, bang,* and I was down again. After the first few times he helped me get on my feet. Then—*bang!* And I'd see a million stars and go down again.

"What a bruiser he is! Every rib in my body is sore. Why, if he had wanted to he could have killed me with his bare hands without half trying! What a man! He's about my height—six feet—but twice as big around; his arms and legs are as big as my thighs. And not an ounce of fat on him either! And he knows the rough-and-tumble game inside and out.

"For a big man he's fast—much faster than I am; and when I was at college I was considered about the fastest amateur heavyweight in the United States. But compared to Tom Carney I'm as slow as an ice wagon. And I used to think I could hit—but when I hit Carney in the belly he didn't even grunt. Why, I think he could trim me and any other man I could chose to give me a hand!"

"He must be tough," remarked the little captain.

"Tough? I'll say he's tough! I'll say one thing about him though; he fights square. That surprized me; I expected him to give me the knee or to gouge, but he didn't. He trimmed me to a turn, but did it fair and square."

"But are you going to let him trim you the other way——"

"Drive me out of business?" cut in Larry quickly. "I am not! I'll keep the *Carib* going if I have to be shoved around the deck, in a wheel chair!"

"But how about this mortgage that's about to be foreclosed?"

Larry's face fell.

"Yes, that's kind of tough," he admitted reluctantly. Then his face brightened. "But I'll find a way out. Something will turn up. I'll just keep battling along to the last ditch; then I'll grab a shovel and dig another ditch behind that one!"

"How about your partner? Does he feel the same about it as you do?"

"George Bronson? Sure; he's a sticker, George is. Of course, the way things are now it's enough to discourage anybody. But George isn't a quitter. What we need is money; and gosh, it seems like all the money in Haiti runs when it hears us coming."

Captain Mac and Shang Toy exchanged quick glances, and the former nodded shortly.

"Carney's got plenty of money," continued Larry. "A big company is backing him, and somehow it doesn't seem fair. And all the dirty tricks they pulled! Of course we're dealing out some pretty stiff ones now ourselves, but we didn't start it. Carney fights square enough with his fists, but he doesn't fight square in business. He and Scofield, the solicitor, started the dirty work, and we had to pull the same stuff to hold our own. It goes against me, but what can we do?"

"Why not call in the police?"

"What good would that do? There's darn little we could prove, and they'd only fine him and let him go, anyway. The gendarmes are all right, but they'd simply call it a case of the pot calling the kettle black and let it go at that. Besides, the American occupation is liable to come to an end at any minute—and what then? No; this is a finish fight, and when once it's finished it will be finished for good. We're all of us agreed on that."

Old Shang Toy, his yellow face as bland and expressionless as ever, now took a hand in the conversation.

"We like you," he said frankly, "and believe you are unduly handicapped. Captain Mac and I agree that you deserve an even chance. What is the amount of the mortgage that is on your schooner?"

"Six thousand dollars," faltered Larry.

"I will lend you six thousand dollars and whatever interest is due, on your personal note; also, I will lend you enough money to carry your overhead for any reasonable length of time, say three months, or six if you prefer."

Larry stared open-mouthed.

"Why—why——"

He backed to a chair and sank weakly into it.

"Say, do you mean that, honest?"

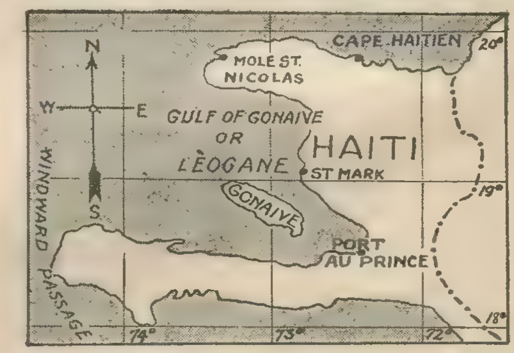
"Give me your note," answered Shang Toy, "and I will place the proper amount to your credit in the American Foreign Bank of Port-au-Prince."

"Gosh!" gasped Larry. "Gosh! And I thought you sent for me just to tell me you had got the kind of coconut-fiber scarf I wanted!"

TOGETHER Captain Mac and Larry Woods left Shang Toy's and walked to the waterfront and out upon the long stone jetty that ended in a wooden pier and freight shed. The schooner *Carib* lay moored alongside the jetty where the wooden pier began.

"There she is," said Larry with a proud wave of his good arm.

The *Carib* was a broad, roomy, comfortable-looking two-master with gray hull and housing and spar-colored masts and booms. She had three wide hatches, one forward of the foremast and two between the fore- and mainmasts. She was not of the topgallant-forecastle type but flush-decked; a box hatch forward led to the sailors' forecastle and another aft led to the after quarters. She seemed well kept up; her decks were clean, her canvas was new and her rigging in good condition.



"She looks like a good, sturdy sea boat," remarked Captain Mac. "Handy boat sailing free, but not quite so good on the wind, eh?"

"That's right," admitted Larry. "But I can get her close enough up to the wind when she's loaded heavy. She's kind of tubby when she's light."

As they stood there, discussing the vessel, six natives emerged from the forecastle; and at the same instant a bony, lantern-jawed man came from aft. He advanced toward the six natives and clutched the foremost one, a scrawny, weak-looking black, by the throat.

"What d'you want now?" demanded the bony white man.

The black squirmed and struggled, trying to break away, but couldn't; and the white man, cursing, suddenly swung his free hand and smashed the negro upon the mouth. Then he threw him to the deck and kicked him fiercely.

Larry Woods leaped from the jetty to the rail of the schooner, then to the deck.

"Here, cut that out, George!" he cried. "I told you I wouldn't stand for beating up the men."

Bronson, letting the negro go, swung about, on his face a sarcastic smile.

"I know you won't stand for it," he said. "That's why you're always havin' trouble with your crew. You gotta treat these niggers rough, or they'll walk all over you. Knock 'em around, and they'll like you."

"That so? Well, you let me handle the schooner and the crew. You take care of your end of the business by rustling up some cargoes."

"That's just what I've been doing," retorted Bronson triumphantly. "I got a cargo. There's a full load of dyewood waitin' for you in the Cape. I came down to get 'er ready for you. These —— niggers've been kickin' about their pay. Somebody's give 'em the idea that we're goin' to do 'em out of it. The only way to get that notion out of their heads is to knock it out."

He turned to Captain Mac, on the jetty. "Larry's got the idea that these niggers are regular human beings," he said, grinning. "He's too —— gentle with 'em."

"Just the same he's right this time," said the little captain coolly.

Bronson snorted and turned away.

Captain Mac was surprized and disappointed in Larry's partner; he wondered how Larry had come to pick such a man to go in business with.

Larry was telling Bronson of his good fortune in being offered a loan to pay off the mortgage.

"Well, what d'you know about that old chink!" exclaimed Bronson when the other finished. "That old heathen! We'll have to watch 'im, though, Larry; all them Chinks are crooked as ——, and they'll steal your eye teeth if you get careless. I wonder what his game is."

Larry cast Captain Mac a shamefaced and apologetic look.

"Aw, Shang's all right, George," he protested.

"Yeah—maybe. *Maybe!*" grunted Bronson. "Nevertheless we'll watch 'im."

Captain Mac started along the jetty to where the *Hawk's* gig was waiting to take him out to the ship, anchored inside Lamentin Point.

"Good luck to you, gentlemen," he called.

"Thanks, Cap'n Mac," answered Larry. "We'll probably need it."

"You said it!" put in Bronson. "We'll need it if Carney's at the Cape the same time we are. He probably will be, too. When he hears we got a cargo in the Cape he's sure to get under weigh and steal it away from us. Then there'll be a muss; hey, Larry?"

"That's right, Whose dyewood is it?"

"Lubeck's; and you know how that Dutchman is—he'd rather give freight to Carney than to us. He says we ain't dependable. I had to talk my head off to get 'im to give it to us; even then he wouldn't give us a contract. I think he wanted to give it to Carney, but I told him the *Scorpion* smashed her rudder post and wouldn't be able to leave port for a week. Ha-ha!"

"That's rotten business, though," protested Larry. "No use making a liar and a crook out of yourself just for a few measly dollars."

Bronson snorted and shook his head disgustedly.

"You —— fool!" he said. "Don't you know that anything goes in this game? The idea is to get the money—never mind how. Don't you know Carney would lie himself black in the face to put us on the rocks? Ain't we gotta give him the same dose he's givin' us?"

"Yes, I suppose we have," said Larry wearily. "But it's rotten business."

"It's dirty business only when you lose or get caught," insisted Bronson.

With a final wave of his hand Captain Mac walked toward the end of the pier. He didn't know what to make of the partnership of Woods and Bronson; the former seemed naturally straightforward and honest, but the latter seemed to be morally topsyturvy. Perhaps he had advised Shang Toy wrongly after all, he mused. The thought worried him.

That evening after dinner Captain Mac mounted to the *Hawk's* navigating bridge. Looking shoreward through his binoculars, he saw that the *Carib*, all her canvas cast loose, was being kedged out from the jetty; her foresail was already partly set, and with the wind astern, she was beginning to strain at her mooring lines. The captain saw that she would have to pass between the *Hawk* and the *Scorpion*, lying at anchor on the other side of the narrow channel.

And as he turned his glasses upon the *Scorpion*, his interest suddenly quickened; for standing upon the poop, binoculars to his eyes, was a man who could be none other than Tom Carney. He was indeed big; there was no question about that, and no other way to describe him; even at over a hundred yards his hugeness and herculean build were manifest.

The *Carib*, her foresail drawing, was beginning to creep away from the jetty. Carney suddenly lowered his glasses and, running forward, put his head in the forecastle hatch.

From the forecastle came men—white men. Some of them clambered to the booms and began to cast adrift the frapping-lines holding the furled sails; others went forward and, fitting capstan bars, began to walk-around the anchor windlass.

The clank of the *Scorpion's* anchor chain started Captain Mac into action. Putting the glasses on the rail, he leaped down the ladder to the main deck. A big Scandinavian seaman was standing at the foot of the ladder, and Captain Mac caught him by the arm.

"Where's the gig, Larken?"

"By the gangway, sir."

"All right. Come along with me."

"Aye, sir."

Captain Mac led the way to the gangway, over the side and down to the gig made fast to the bottom grating.

"Take the oars, Larken, and pull toward the channel."

The big Dane bent to the oars with a will, and the light gig began to leap ahead over the calm water of the harbor.

The sun was sliding rapidly down behind the high land in the east; the evening land breeze had freshened and the *Carib*, now in the channel, was showing a curl of white at her cutwater.

"Lay back, Larken," exhorted the captain. "I want to catch that schooner."

The Dane obediently "laid back" and threw his two hundred and forty pounds upon the oars till it seemed their looms would surely break. Captain Mac stood up in the stern sheets and waved his hand; and after a minute or so the *Carib* began to swerve slightly toward the leaping gig. Captain Mac's voice ran out clear as a bugle:

"Ahoy, *Carib!* I'm coming aboard! Stand by with a heaving line!"

The gray schooner bore down upon them; came abreast. A weighted line snaked out and fell across the gig's gunwale. Larken boated his oars, snatched up the line and took a turn in the bow. The line came taut; the gig jerked about and Captain Mac, at the tiller, eased it gently in to within a foot of the schooner's side, then straightened it out.

Larken came aft and took the tiller, and Captain Mac stood on a thwart and leaped for the *Carib's* rail. He threw one arm over, then the other; a hand reached down and gripped his belt—and he was aboard.

"Larken!"

"Sir?"

"Return to the ship and tell the mate I'll send him a wire from Cape Hatien."

"Aye, sir!"

The gig sheered off; Larken let go the line and a black seaman hauled it aboard the schooner.

"Any objection to my making the trip with you?" asked the little captain, turning to Larry Woods.

"Not at all!" said Larry heartily.

"Naw; what's the difference?" put in Bronson.

"But why did you make up your mind so suddenly?" asked Larry as they started aft.

"Why—I don't know," answered Captain Mac, a puzzled look on his lean face.

And it was so—he didn't know!

Larry started in surprize as they came abreast of the *Scorpion*.

"Why, Carney's getting under weigh!" he exclaimed.

Captain Mac nodded.

"Yes," he said; "I was watching him through my binoculars."

"Oh!"

There was an understanding light in Larry's eyes as he furtively studied the little man by his side.

The *Scorpion* was a beautiful vessel; long, lean, graceful, and painted black, she was like a water snake. She was a three-master; and the white canvas being jerked aloft showed an enormous spread of sail.

"She's got the legs of us in anything short of a hurricane," said Larry pensively. "In a stiff gale I might be able to make him shorten sail before I did—though Carney's a terror for cracking on. He's a first-rate seaman, Carney. That other fellow you see there on the poop is Jake Scofield, the solicitor. He makes short voyages with Carney sometimes. See who I mean? That flat-faced baboon hanging over the rail. He's no seaman; he doesn't know the difference between a gin-block and a halyard."

He strode to the wheelbox and took up a pair of glasses, returned and handed them to Captain Mac.

The schooners were barely fifty yards apart now, and Scofield stood out clearly through the powerful lenses. He was a stocky, square-faced man with a cruel gash of a mouth. He glanced up, saw them looking at him and spat toward them, then turned his back and strolled across the poop.

"He's another tough bird, Scofield—and as mean as he's tough," said Larry. "My gimpy arm will be out of its sling in a few days, and when it is, I'm going to take a punch at him for luck. He's a crook in his heart. He used to work for George and me on shares, but he was so crooked that we had to get rid of him. And one night at the club I caught him dealing stud from a cold deck. I called him aside and told him to get out and stay out. I never said anything about it in town."

"If you told about it he'd find it hard to get business, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose he would; but what's the use of doing a trick like that?" said Larry. "I though I'd give him a chance to go straight if he wanted to."

* * *

THE *Scorpion* was off the quarter now. The sun slid down behind the land; the sky darkened as the swift tropic night settled and shut out the surrounding hills. Port-au-Prince Lighthouse, a miserable, useless thing, was showing its sickly green glimmer astern; and Lamentin Light, of questionable value to navigation, was flashing weakly off the port beam.

"I'd like to make Cape Hatien before six tomorrow evening," said Larry.

"You'd better make it before six," said Captain Mac. "It's against the law to enter any Hatien port after six P.M."

"That's what I was thinking of. I don't want to have to lay outside all night."

Bronson, when not soliciting business ashore, sometimes acted as mate of the *Carib*. He was now forward and could be heard raging at the natives, who had tailed on to the flying jib halyard and were jerking the billowing triangular sail aloft. The fore and main topsails, the jib and outer jib, were already set, and the schooner was heeling over gently to the quartering wind.

"Carney'll be under weigh in half an hour," said Larry. "Then he'll come sliding along after us like we were standing still. He probably won't try to overhaul us, though, till he sees where we're headed for."

Two hours later they passed Arcadins Reef Light and entered St. Marc Channel, between Gonaive Island and the mainland; and Larry gave the black helmsman the course that would take them to White Horse Point, seventy-five miles ahead—

"Let 'er go no'west b' west."

"No'wes' b' wes', sah."

Larry called to Bronson, who was still amusing himself by harrying the deckhands; and the bony man reluctantly left off and came aft.

"Set the watch and turn in, George," ordered Larry. "We'll split the watches, you and I. I'll take 'er till midnight and you take 'er till six in the morning——"

"No use standing watch and watch unless you have to," broke in Captain Mac. "Make it four on and eight off, and I'll take the four-to-eight."

"Sure; why not?" said Bronson.

"Well, if you really want to," said Larry. "It will make it easier all around."

"Of course it will." The little man turned toward the companionway to go below. "Now where do I sleep?"

"Well, there's a good wide transom in my room," said Larry. "How will that do?"

"Good enough!"

"You go down with the cap'n, George, and show him where things are."

"Sure," said Bronson and went down the ladder.

Before following, Captain Mac glanced astern. A green and a red light, close together, were coming after them. Carney's black snake was sliding along in their wake.

CAPTAIN MAC awoke with the feeling that something was wrong. He sat up; and at that instant a light flared as Larry Woods, in the bunk across the little room, struck a match.

"What's up?" asked Captain Mac.

"That's what I want to know," answered Larry, leaving his bunk and fumbling with the lamp bracketed on the wall.

"She's listed over too far to port for one thing," said Captain Mac.

"Gosh, that's right! George must have hauled 'er around—I know darn well the trade wind didn't take a notion to come out of the nor'west all of a sudden."

The *Carib* was listed far over to port, whereas if she were on her proper course with the wind over the quarter she would have had a very slight list.

"The wind must be abeam," said Larry, a perplexed frown on his face.

A sudden shout came to them from above:

"Aw, pull in your ears, you half-witted bum! You're only a cheap crook, anyway!"

"That's George!" exclaimed Larry, reaching for his clothes.

They hurried into their clothes and together left the room and mounted the ladder to the poop.

Larry gasped as he stepped to the deck. Sure enough, the wind was abeam; and off the starboard bow was a long black hull and three tall masts holding aloft an enormous spread of canvas, all silver-gray in the moonlight. It was the *Scorpion*, beam on; and not fifty yards separated her from the bow of the onrushing *Carib*.

On the poop of the *Carib* stood George Bronson, in one hand a long revolver. The negro helmsman, the whites of his eyes showing, was staring fearfully over his shoulder at the bony white man.

Larry sprang to the wheel, shoved the black aside and began to put down spokes as fast as he could with his one good arm. The helm hard a-starboard, and the schooner beginning to sheer off from the *Scorpion*, he turned the wheel over to the native and started toward Bronson.

"What the —— are you trying to do, George?" he demanded. "Are you mad?"

"That —— Scofield," growled Bronson, pointing to the poop of the *Scorpion*. "He's been hangin' on our quarter for the last two hours, blanketin' us so that the canvas was flappin' like a lot of wash on the line. I was just tryin' to scare him up a bit."

"You fool! I might have known better than to let you take a watch. After this you better stay ashore and leave the schooner to me. What's the use of going out of your way to look for trouble?"

"Well, what's he want to hang to windward of us for? Tell me that. Anyway I was only givin' 'im a scare."

Larry, too angry for words, turned away.

A streak of orange flame flashed out from the stern of the *Scorpion;* there was the angry whine of a bullet and the crash of a revolver. The three white men dropped behind the weather rail, and the negro helmsman ducked behind the wheelbox.

"It's that —— Scofield," growled Bronson. "See 'im?"

Scofield could be seen plainly in the moonlight. He was standing at the far side of the cabin skylight and was resting his elbows on its top to steady his aim.

"Seems like he was shooting at George," remarked Larry.

He ducked as another bullet sang overhead.

"Poor shootin'," said Bronson, grinning. "Watch me plug the ——."

He stretched himself flat on the deck and aimed his revolver through a hause hole cut in the bulwark.

"Don't shoot," said Captain Mac, who had cautiously looked over the rail. "There's Carney—let's see what he's going to do."

Carney, in trousers and undershirt, had stepped from the after companion hatch. Striding to Scofield, he roared an angry question, and his great voice, as big and bold and strong as the man himself, came down on the wind to them—

"What're you doing?"

They could not hear Scofield's answer; but they saw Carney swing his open hand

and knock the flat-faced man sprawling across the skylight.

"Now I can get him," said Bronson—and his gun crashed before Captain Mac, leaping toward him, could wrest it away.

Tom Carney clapped a hand to his cheek, took it away, looked at it; then he raised himself to his full height and shook both great fists at them. He ran to the companion hatch and disappeared within.

"——, I didn't mean to hit him," grunted Bronson. "I aimed at Scofield. Well, what's the difference——"

"Duck!" cried Larry. "Carney's got a shotgun."

Shot spattered about the *Carib* as the shotgun roared twice.

"You dirty, sneaking rats!" boomed Carney. "Heave to and I'll come over and beat the heads off the lot of you!"

"Aw, go to ——!" retorted Bronson.

"Shut up!" snapped Larry, turning on Bronson. "It was you that started all this."

"Rats!"

"Yes; it was you—you and Scofield. Couldn't you see Carney was trying to put a stop to it? Why didn't you give him a chance?"

"Aw, rats! I'm only sorry I didn't plug the pair of 'em. The way you act toward Carney you'd think he was your twin brother. And only yesterday he was kickin' you all over the wharf in Port-au-Prince."

"That's right; so he was. But where were you? Scofield was there all the time, sitting on the stringpiece, laughing like a hyena. Why didn't you come out and make it two pair instead of hiding aboard the schooner? Scofield would have accommodated you."

"Hidin'?" snarled Bronson. "Like ——! I was asleep."

"Asleep! With all that noise? You must have been dead!"

Since the helmsman's terrified dive for the shelter of the wheelbox the two schooners had been sheering away from each other at right angles and were now about two hundred yards apart. The *Carib's* sails were slatting and the booms banging from side to side.

"The fireworks are all over, I guess," said Captain Mac; and, turning to the helmsman: "Hard aport. Put 'er on the course—nor'west b' west."

"No'wes' b' wes', sah."

The vessel swung, the sails filled and she began to pick up speed. The *Scorpion*, now forward of the beam, was foaming along with a roll of molten silver beneath her bow and a frothy, phosphorescent wake.

"Now that we're past St. Marc and Gonaives," said Larry, "he'll run ahead and wait for us off St. Nicholas. Then when he sees that we're making for Cape Haitien he'll shoot ahead and beat us in. And the chances are two to one that he'll get the cargo that Lubeck promised us. He's got a faster schooner and a better crew. All white men; did you notice it? He can afford to hire good men; pays them forty-five dollars a month, while I can only afford to hire natives, at a gourde and a half—thirty cents—a day."

Bronson looked at his watch, struck eight bells, surlily turned the schooner over to Captain Mac and went below.

"Still, it's costing him a lot of money to fight me the way he's doing," went on Larry. "There's enough work here for two schooners, and Carney's losing a lot of business by chasing me around. He's just determined to drive me out of Haiti. That's how pig-headed he is.

"It all started when he'd been here about a month. The *Scorpion* caught on fire, and Scofield blamed it on me. He told Carney that I had said all the trade on the north coast belonged to me because I was here first. He said he'd seen me sneaking away in a shore boat the night the schooner caught fire.

"When I heard what they were saying I went to Carney and tried to straighten things out, but I couldn't; that —— lie Scofield told him was buzzing around in his head, and he couldn't hear anything else. He said if I wanted fight he'd give it to me and a —— sight more than I wanted. He thinks a lot of those two schooners of his, you see, and if he lost one of them it would just about break his heart. I don't blame him—but, gosh! I wish he'd listen to sense. Fight, fight, fight—I wish it was over!"

"Don't say that," said Captain Mac. "Fighting is good for the backbone—even if you lose. Twenty-five years from now you'll look back and be sorry that your fighting days are over. But what I mean to say is, don't wish. A man can usually end a fight in one of three ways: He can quit, shake hands or knock the other fellow kicking."

"I'll not quit!"

"Well?"

"And Carney won't shake hands."

"Then you see what's left."

"Oh, don't worry; I'll do my best, and if there's any way I can down Carney I'll do it. But you see what I'm up against. He's got more money, a faster and better schooner and a better crew; and man to man he can break me across his knee. By mutual agreement the police are out.

"Then too he's liable to bring his other schooner around from the south coast, and make it two to one. I won't have a chance if he does. He could put one ahead of me and one behind me, and I'd not be able to get enough freight to fill a matchbox. You see what I'm up against."

It was getting gray in the east now, and the breeze was again beginning to freshen off shore. Captain Mac shoved his soft white uniform cap to the back of his head, looked aloft, frowned and cast a sharp warning to the drowsy helmsman. The black starte, gulped and began to put down spokes.

"Take a pull on your topsail halyards!" shouted the little captain to the watch on deck, gathered in the lee of the midship deckhouse. "Break out the rest of the gang to give you a hand."

He turned back to Larry.

"And how about Bronson? Pretty good man; eh?" he said, watching the tall young schooner captain narrowly.

"George? Oh, sure; he's all right. I don't know what's wrong with him here lately, though; seems like he's making things worse rather than better. I guess I don't mean everything I say to him. We've been friends for quite a while. We were together in a transport during the war—he was bosun and I was third mate. Then after the war— Say, they've swigged the halyards off and made 'em fast already!"

"That's what I told them to do. What of it?"

"Why—why——"

Larry stared open-mouthed at the half dozen negroes, who, having two-blocked their tackle, were unhooking it from the main topsail halyard.

"But they did it so quickly!" he gasped.

"That's the way they should do it."

"But gosh, there was nobody there to show them how to do it or hurry 'em up or anything!"

"There shouldn't be," said Captain Mac, shaking his head. "Let 'em think they know a lot, and don't need to be bossed, and they'll do things in half the time and just as well. That's the way to get work out of black men—and white men too, for that matter."

"I guess you know what you're talking about," agreed Larry.

It was a lesson in leadership; the sort of lesson that the nautical schools do not include in their curriculums. It was a practical demonstration, and Larry indexed it mentally for future use.

"Of course it don't hurt to keep an eye on them," Captain Mac said; "but you don't have to stand over them with a belaying pin in your fist."

For the first time Larry began to give full credence to the remarkable tales he had heard of Captain Mac and his crew; how the men of the *Hawk*, tough, hard-bitten fighters all, would curse their captain as long as any one would give ear, but would allow no one else to lift his voice against him.

THE under sides of the clouds in the east turned pink, then red; the sun popped up over the horizon like a stage sun on a wire. The night mist faded, and the Gulf of Leogane, a great expanse of white-capped waves, lay clean and fresh beneath a turquoise sky.

The *Scorpion* was now a quarter of a mile ahead. About ten miles off the starboard bow was Platform Point, a blue hump on the horizon. Directly ahead lay the Windward Passage.

"Suppose we heave to for a while, Cap'n Woods," said Captain Mac suddenly. "I'll go forward and wait for the word."

Larry opened his mouth to protest, but the little man was gone, and he found himself giving an order to the man at the wheel—

"Hard aport!"

"Hard aport, sah!"

The *Carib* wore around in a wide circle and began to come up into the wind.

"Helm's alee!" shouted Larry.

Captain Mac's bugle-like voice carried from bow to stern:

"Main boom amidships! Haul aft weather jib sheet! Slack off foresheet!"

And a few minutes later—

"Slack away jib sheet!"

The men jumped to obey, and in a surprizingly short time the schooner was at rest bow on to the wind.

Captain Mac came swinging aft. There was a sparkle in his black eyes and a boyish lift to his shoulders; and one corner of his hard mouth was slightly lifted in what was almost a smile—the nearest expression to a smile Larry had yet seen on the somber little man's face.

"What's the idea of heaving 'er to?" asked Larry, puzzled—puzzled both at Captain Mac's order and at himself for obeying so promptly.

"We'll start the day right," answered the little captain. "Come on, Larry!"

The little man moved quickly. He tossed aside his cap, his coat, his shirt, his shoes—in twenty seconds he stood stark naked. His bare toes gripped the yellow pine planks; he raised his arms over his head and filled his lungs with the warm tropic air.

Larry gasped. He had seen college oarsmen, football players, trackmen and most of the professional wrestlers and pugilists of the day, but never had he seen such a marvelous human form as stood before him now; rather below medium height, not weighing over a hundred and fifty pounds, not muscular in the usual sense of the word, yet—marvelous. Marvelous in its suggestion of swiftness, of precision, of rawhide endurance and steel-spring resilience.

The little man's skin, with the exception of face, neck and hands, was white as milk; and beneath it long, flat muscles jumped and quivered as he moved. The muscles of his wide shoulders sloped upward at the neck, giving him a somewhat round-shouldered appearance; the muscles of his back and thighs stood out in small, tight bunches and ridges, sliding, rippling, coiling and uncoiling beneath the smooth, white skin like baby snakes beneath a tight-drawn handkerchief. The arms were long and slender, the forearms nearly as large in circumference as the upper arms, with their flat, smooth muscles.

"What are you waiting for? Oh, your arm," said Captain Mac, turning upon Larry. "I forgot."

"Yes; Carney almost tore it out of its socket, and I thought a few days' rest in a sling would do it good."

"That's right."

Captain Mac suddenly sprang into action like an uncoiling spring. He leaped to the rail, ran forward, jumped and swung nimbly to the shrouds, then went up, up, ratline after ratline. Far up he shot out from the shrouds, doubled and came whirling down like a great white pinwheel, to within his own length of the water, when he straightened out and slipped beneath the surface like a young seal going after a fish.

A flash of white, far down, all disproportioned and twisted grotesquely by the refraction of the water; then he came up, shot half his length above the surface and swam off with a long, driving crawl stroke that left frothy water in his wake.

He kept on steadily, tirelessly, until his head was only a black dot bobbing and disappearing behind the short, choppy seas; then he turned and came churning back, dived and swam the last twenty yards under water, caught the line that Larry flung and came lightly over the side, pink with the exertion, breathing easily and deeply, his black eyes sparkling and one corner of his mouth lifted in his peculiar half smile. He caught up his clothes from the deck and went swiftly below.

In a few minutes he reappeared, dressed again in his blue serge trousers, white shirt and battered white-topped uniform cap; and he was again the thoughtful, low-spoken, somber little man that the shipping world knew as One-Two Mac, the bucko sea captain.

"Gosh! That was wonderful!" breathed Larry.

"Eh? What?"

"The way you dived and swam and came up over the side like a cat——"

"Oh, that. I always keep in trim," said Captain Mac simply. "And now, Larry, your chart—where is it?"

Young Captain Woods started with pleasure; twice the other had called him "Larry," and he liked it.

"It's below, Cap'n Mac," he said. "Wait—I'll get it."

He went below and returned quickly with the chart, spread it on the skylight, weighted the corners with canvas-covered half bricks, and handed Captain Mac a pair of dividers.

"Now here's St. Nicholas and here's Cape Hatien; the distance between is seventy-seven miles—by steamer. But with this wind——"

Captain Mac went to the binnacle, removed the cover and took the bearing of the wind across the floating compass card.

"With this wind you will have to take the *Carib* north of Tortuga Island. That makes the distance—" he stepped the distance off with the dividers—"about a hundred miles or a bit over. Now we're just off St. Nicholas, and of course you can easily make Cape Hatien before six o'clock tonight; but as soon as you pass St. Nicholas, Carney, waiting ahead there, will know that you are making for the Cape, and he'll shoot ahead and beat you in by two or three hours and probably get Lubeck to give him the cargo promised you.

"Now if you can keep Carney from knowing where you're headed for till it's too late for him to make the Cape before the port closes, at six P.M., then you'll have an even chance because you both will have to wait outside till the port opens at six tomorrow morning. Do you see what I'm getting at?"

"Sure; I see what you mean. I've been following you right along. We'll just go into St. Nicholas; he'll follow us, and when we come out again this afternoon we can laugh at him, no matter how fast his old schooner is."

"Right!"

The schooner was swung about and headed north, and two hours later was anchored in the little bay that is known as St. Nicholas Mole; and close after came Carney's black snake, a boat swung over the quarter, and the giant skipper standing by in readiness to go ashore.

To carry out the deception, Bronson was roused out, and after the scheme was explained to him, sent ashore in the gig, and with him went Captain Mac.

"I want to send a telegram to—to Port-au-Prince," he told Larry as he went over the side.

The *Scorpion's* boat was in the water, and in it were Carney and Scofield, and two seamen to pull them in to the landing.

"This is the time we put it over on that —— Scofield," growled Bronson, scowling at the other boat.

"Why only Scofield? Why not Carney too?" asked Captain Mac, looking curiously at Larry's agent.

"Well—both of 'em."

They returned to the *Carib* at two o'clock that afternoon, as had been agreed upon. Bronson was gloriously drunk, and he guffawed loudly as he clambered over the rail.

"You should 'a' seen 'em—Scofield and Carney" he roared, slapping Larry heavily upon the back. "They been runnin' around like a coupla dogs chasin' their tails, lookin' for freight. They buttonholed every exporter and planter they could find. Haw-haw!"

A quart bottle of Hatien rum slipped from his pocket and smashed on the deck. He kicked it and swore, but forgot his anger as he caught sight of the *Scorpion's* boat, with Carney and Scofield, passing abeam.

"Hey!" he shouted, running to the rail. "Couldn't you find any freight? Haw-haw!"

"Stop making a fool of yourself," snapped Larry, casting an apologetic look at Captain Mac.

"Aw, you're a horse's neck-tie!" retorted Bronson; and with a disgruntled air the lantern-jawed agent thumped below.

Captain Mac looked after him, a thoughtful look on his brown face.

"Say, Larry," he said after some seconds, "you told me you caught Scofield cheating at cards. How did you catch him?"

"Well, it wasn't really me that caught him; it was George. George is pretty sharp that way. He came to me one night at the club and said he'd seen Scofield ring in a cold deck; said he seen him do it a couple of times before, too. I felt like it was up to me, because it was through George and me that Scofield had got in the club. George had known him before and recommended him, and we gave him a job.

"The fellows he was playing with that night at the club were friends of mine, and good fellows besides, and I couldn't stand by and see them getting robbed. So I called Scofield aside and told him to keep out of the club and out of card games as long as he was in Haiti, or I'd expose him and have him driven out. Then, George agreeing, I fired him, and he went over to Carney.

"I understand that he told Carney that he left us because we tried to cheat him out of some money we owed him, and I've been kind of sorry ever since that I didn't tell all hands what he was doing that night at the club. Now it's too late, I guess."

"Yes; if you told now everybody would think you were squealing because you were getting licked."

"The crew have been kicking again," said Larry, shaking his head. "It looks like I'll have to pay them all off in the Cape, and put them ashore. Maybe I'll be able to pick up another crew and maybe I won't. They're all so afraid of Carney and Scofield that I have a hard job getting them and a harder job keeping them."

"Don't worry about it," advised Captain Mac.

The *Carib* was got under weigh, worked out of the bay and into the Windward Passage and put on a course that would take her north of Tortuga Island on the starboard tack; then when enough northing had been made she would be hauled about, put on the port tack and headed for Cape Hatien, making the short voyage in two legs.

After them came the *Scorpion*. The low, black three-master overhauled them rapidly, came abeam and went ahead. Tom Carney would now go unhesitatingly to the Cape, which he now knew must be the *Carib's* objective, as the towns in between, besides being small and not likely to contain any freight worth competing for, had all been worked recently by both schooners and cleaned of all available cargo.

The *Carib* rounded Cape St. Nicholas and laid over on her side as the full force of the trade wind struck her bellowing canvas. Great graybacks slopped over the weather bow, rolled across the deck and poured over the lee rail and out of the scuppers; for months the trade wind had been blowing steadily from approximately the same direction and with about the same force, and there was no land to windward nearer than Caicos Bank, over a hundred and fifty miles northeastward. Scupper lids clanged, wires hummed, tackles clacked, and wind-blown spray spattered like hail against the straining sails.

"We'll have to shorten sail," said Larry, starting forward; and then: "Look ahead there at the *Scorpion*—she's cracking on like mad, with everything set. That's the way Carney does when he's angry about anything. He'll do it once too often, and yank the sticks out of her. I'll bet Scofield is scared sick. He's no seaman, you know."

He went forward, shouting for the crew.

"Let 'er fall off a bit," Captain Mac ordered the man at the wheel, then turned, picked the glasses off the wheelbox and leveled them astern.

He looked for over a minute, took the glasses from his eyes, dried their lenses with his handkerchief and raised them again. Then he nodded, and one corner of his mouth lifted slightly as he put the glasses back on the wheelbox.

Far astern, just peeping over the horizon, were the shining white sails of two schooners.

AT FIVE-THIRTY the next mornnig the *Carib* came upon the *Scorpion*, hove to off Point Picolet, the northeastern extremity of the promontory of Cape Hatien. Together the two schooners stood in and anchored within two hundred yards of each other in the harbor.

When Bronson, after letting go the anchor, came aft, he shook his head disgustedly and said to Larry:

"Sailors are kickin' again. Goin' to pay 'em off?"

Larry, a worried look on his face, nodded.

"If it was me," said Bronson, "I'd beat their —— heads off and make 'em stay aboard whether they wanted to or not. A good lacin' would make 'em forget all about quittin'."

"No; that wouldn't be right. They've got the right to quit if they want to. Besides, the gendarmes would jump all over us if we tried any shanghai stuff."

While they were getting the gig overside, the *Scorpion's* boat, with Scofield in the sternsheets, passed on its way to the wharf.

"Look at the bum tryin' to beat us to it," growled Bronson.

Captain Mac and Bronson dropped into the gig; the latter took the oars and began to pull over the rippling surface of the bay, all aglow with the dancing sunlight. They made the wharf but a few minutes after Scofield, who had already entered the town.

"Now I'll go scout up that Dutchman, Lubeck," said Bronson, "and see if he hasn't changed his mind. His business would help us out a lot if we could get it steady. You goin' with me?"

"No. I'll meet you later. Let me make a suggestion. If you can't talk Lubeck into giving you the freight, if there's any chance of him bolting to Carney, get him to walk down to the wharf with you before deciding."

"What's the idea?"

"Well, I'm not sure yet, but I think something's due to break. You bring Lubeck down to the wharf, eh?"

"I'll try."

They separated as they entered the town. Captain Mac went to the café of Paddy O'Shay, and upon entering, took the hand of the red-faced Irishman who reached over the bar.

"Are my men here, Paddy?" asked Captain Mac.

"Yis, sorr; they've been here since twelve las' night. Well and hearty! An' six as tough-lookin' birds as I ever seen, they are! And drink! They've all been drunk an' sober again twice since las' night!"

He went to a rear door and shouted one word—

"Juicer."

A man wearing a short, blue seaman's jacket and a torn uniform cap came to the door and looked into the barroom. He was a squat, bowlegged Englishman, a "lime-juicer," with sun-browned cheeks showing through his week's growth of beard. He started as he saw Captain Mac, touched the vizor of his cap in a seaman's salute and advanced, grinning.

"Who did you bring with you, Bose?" asked Captain Mac.

"The mite tol' me to pick hout the five toughest men in th' deck-force, sir, an' I did. I brung Malley, th' ex-pug; big Tork Larken, th' Dane, and those three blokes you 'ad in irons las' trip fer tryin' to knock th' 'eads off th' whole black gang. I got th' sime bunch what 'elped yer to clean hout Tub Watson's plice in Colon."

"Good enough! Round them up and bring them down to the wharf. I'll be there waiting for you."

"Aye, sir."

The cockney touched his cap and went into the back room and could be heard shouting for the five men of the *Hawk's* crew he had brought with him from Port-au-Prince.

Captain Mac had a drink of "th' rale owld stuff, roight from Dublin," with Paddy O'Shay, then left and made his way to the wharf. Bronson and a fat, blond man whom the captain took to be Lubeck were already there, and with them was Scofield, Carney's agent. The Dutch exporter was talking as Captain Mac approached.

"Put it vasse a lie dat you toldt me, Pronson. You toldt me dat de *Scorpion* hat smash her rutter post andt couldt not carry de freight. Dat was vy I give de logwoodt to you andt Voods."

"Yeh; that's the only way they can get cargo, Mr. Lubeck," broke in Scofield. "It's dirty business, that's what I call it."

"What d'you mean, dirty business?" retorted Bronson. "What d'you call that trick you pulled on us last trip, huh? You told old Schaefer that we wasn't goin' to make St. Marc and took the freight that he had waitin' for us. How 'bout that; huh?"

"Don't you believe him, Mr. Lubeck. You know that Carney and me ain't the kind o' guys to pull dirty tricks. He's a —— liar."

"Say, you —— crook," cried Bronson, advancing threateningly upon the other, "I got a good notion to smash your —— face in."

"Chentlemen, chentlemen!" interposed the fat Dutchman. "Ve iss not here to fight. You, Pronson, you toldt me a lie, and dat iss not right."

"It was dirty, that's what," said Scofield. "No honest business man like Tom Carney or me would try to get business that way."

"Honest!" snorted Bronson.

"Yeah, honest!" The square-faced man emphasized his words with a vigorous nod. "Besides, Mr. Lubeck, you know yourself that you can't never depend on the *Carib*. She's liable to start out from here with your wood, get as far as St. Nicholas, and then have to lay up for a week waitin' for a new crew. Can't never depend on 'er. You know that."

"Dat iss so," agreed Lubeck, nodding slowly.

"And when Tom Carney says he'll get your wood to Port-au-Prince on a certain date, he does. Ain't that right?"

"Dat iss right."

"And look there—" Scofield pointed to a tall white schooner standing in for Point Picolet—"that's Carney's other schooner, the *Salamander*, come around from the south coast to help drive the *Carib* out of Haiti. Carney's sick of all this crooked stuff they been pullin'. With two schooners we'll grab every ounce of freight in every port, and they'll be sellin' the *Carib* at auction in two months.

"You better string along with the winners, Mr. Lubeck. We know you're a big man here in north Haiti, and we want your business, and if you don't give it to us now you're only goin' to make it hard for yourself when the *Salamander* and the *Scorpion* are the only feeders on the coast. I ain't threatenin' or anything like that, Mr. Lubeck; but some time you might want a feeder bad, and you can't expect us to let other business go if you don't treat us right now."

"Den I shall gif my freight to a steamer," said Lubeck.

"Steamer? Huh! Steamers ain't runnin' to the Cape like they was before the war. You know that."

"Dat iss right too."

"Don't you worry about Carney runnin' the only feeders on the coast," said Bronson, anxiously watching the fat exporter's face. "Woods and me'll be here when Carney's sellin' lead pencils and this mutt is doin' time in the pen."

"You —— ——!" cried Scofield. "What d'you mean? Spit it out!"

"You know what I mean."

With a howl of rage Scofield sprang toward Bronson, but Lubeck again put himself between them.

"Chentlemen, chentlemen! If you vant only to fight, vy do you make me leafe my *genever* and come all de vay here to see you do it? I don't know vat to do. You howl so dat I can't even dink. Quiet, pleass."

He took off his white sun helmet, wiped his brow and sleeked back his blond hair.

"Vat poat is dat coming in after de *Salamander*?" he asked. "It iss also a schooner."

Bronson and Scofield shook their heads.

"You see, chentlemen, I am a pusiness man. I do vat I dink iss goot for Paul Lubeck. I vork hardt, andt I am honest; but I am not a —— fool. No?"

Lubeck was a business man; no doubt of that. He was anxious to "string" with the prospective winner now so as to be on the victorious side when the fight was over. Trade at present was slack, but was expected to pick up; and when it did, quick and reliable transportation would be at a premium.

He knew that each of the two sides doing the feeding for the Port-au-Prince steamers was determined to drive the other out of Haiti, and one side was bound to go under, not because there was a scarcity of freight—even now, slack as business was, there was enough freight to support two schooners—but because each was wasting his strength fighting the other. Lubeck wanted to be in the good graces of the winning side. Woods and Bronson, with two schooners against their one, stood not a chance, concluded Lubeck.

"And there's the *Carib's* nigger crew quittin'," said Scofield, breaking in upon the Dutchman's thoughts at exactly the proper moment. "See them gettin' in the boat. Now they ain't even got a crew. And they won't be gettin' one in the Cape in a hurry, either."

He nodded knowingly.

"I guess you better string along with us, Mr. Lubeck, " he added. "Treat us right now and we'll treat you right when everybody's fightin' for a feeder to carry their freight. You don't want your cargo to be two weeks gettin' to Port-au-Prince."

"It won't be two weeks," growled Bronson. "If it is, we'll pay demurrage."

"Demurrage!" snorted Scofield. "My ——! Why, he can't even pay his hotel bill. He's two months back. I guess it's all settled; huh, Mr. Lubeck? We got everything rigged, ready to begin loadin', and I'll start the barges out whenever you say so."

"Vell, I dink so—" began Lubeck, but stopped as Captain Mac, who had been sitting on the stringpiece of the wharf, arose and came forward.

"Mr. Lubeck, I'm Captain McGuire, of the steamer *Hawk*. I have sort of a friendly interest in Larry Woods, captain of the *Carib*. A very good friend of mine is backing Larry financially, and he is doing it on my advice, so it's kind of up to me to see that he doesn't lose his money. Anyway, no matter what the reason, I'm on Woods' side of this —— fool squabble over cargo. Shang Toy and I are backing him to win ——"

"Shang Toy!" exclaimed Lubeck. "You say Shang Toy iss ——"

"Yes. Shang Toy is backing Larry Woods."

"Ah! Shang Toy andt Vun-Two Mac! Vell—maype dings iss different dan I t'ought."

"They are different! Shut up, you!" turning upon Scofield, who had opened his mouth to speak. "Things are different. That schooner you see out there, the second one, is the *Gannet*, the McClones' boat. She has been chartered by Woods and Bronson."

"Huh?" gasped Bronson.

"Let me talk. She is going to work this coast with the *Carib* until further notice. 'Black Michael' McClone is master of her, and his brother Jem is with him as mate, and everybody in Haiti knows that when the McClone brothers start anything they carry it through. Carney and this yegg he's got as runner won't get away with anything on them. Besides ——"

Captain Mac turned and beckoned to a group of men waiting by the corner of the customhouse shed—and out on the dock strode the bowlegged cockney boatswain, behind him five tough, hard-bitten seamen.

"Besides, Mr. Lubeck, here is the *Carib's* new crew. Stand up there on the stringpiece, boys, so the gentlemen can look you over. Don't they look capable, Mr. Lubeck? The bosun there, for instance—he's been going to sea for twenty years. And that ugly fellow with his nose slewed over to one side—he's an ex-prizefighter, but don't hold that against him; he's as good a seaman as anybody would want. And that big Dane—two hundred and forty pounds; he used to be a Skagerrack River pilot, and you know what that means. The three others—well, they're real tough seamen; last trip I had to clap 'em in irons to keep them from licking about a dozen coal passers. Fact!

"Now, Mr. Lubeck, here's the way she shapes up: We've got two good schooners, crews that can't be bulldozed and scared ashore by Tom Carney and his yegg, and plenty of money. We're going to fight to a finish—if I have to get six months' leave from my ship to see it through!

"Now you're not the only shipper in Haiti. We can get along without you. This handful of logwood you have here now don't matter a bit one way or the other. But we know that you often have big shipments and ship pretty regularly, and we want your business. And perhaps you would like to be friends with Woods and Bronson when the shooting is over. How about it?"

"Vell, if Shang Toy iss in it, andt you, andt de McClones—vell, I dink ——"

"It's settled then!" said the little captain quickly. Bronson, start the barges out. And get these men aboard. Then make out a contract, guaranteeing demurrage, for Mr. Lubeck."

"Say!" ejaculated Scofield, recovering from his surprize. "What kind of a flimflam game do you call this anyhow?"

"Beat it, you—you yegg!" retorted Bronson. "That's just what you are—a yegg. Haw-haw!"

"Don't laugh yet. It ain't all over; and we'll square things with you —— robbers before it is," growled Scofield.

Bronson laughed long and loudly as the square-faced man, cursing foully, went over the edge of the wharf and into his boat, where two of his men waited to pull him out to the schooner. Lubeck, now satisfied that his cargo was in the proper hands, left the wharf, bound for the shady porch of the hotel and a glass of his beloved *genever*.

"I'll be —— if that wasn't slick!" said Bronson admiringly. "Slick!"

"No, it wasn't slick," answered the captain. "That's the trouble with you—you try to be too darn slick. Why don't you try straightforward business methods for a change? Oh, I know that Carney was doing the same things you were, perhaps worse; but now you'd better forget it and 'tend to business."

"Sure; I guess so. What's this about us charterin' the *Gannet?*"

"Shang Toy chartered her for you. He heard that Carney was bringing the *Salamander* around, and he wired the McClones. They wanted to keep out of the fight and wouldn't have come in for anybody but Shang Toy; they knew anything he was in was bound to be all right."

"That's right, I guess. Wise bird, that old chink."

"Rather," murmured Captain Mac.

"And how about these sailors? Where'd they come from?"

"From the *Hawk*. They're my men. I wired the mate to send them on yesterday, when we were in St. Nicholas Mole. I knew your men would quit as soon as we got in. Of course, you can have these men for only about ten days, but I think you'll be straightened out by then; and if not, then you can borrow some of McClone's men from the south coast."

"Looks like we got 'em licked."

"Looks that way."

"That —— Scofield!"

"You worry a lot about Scofield."

"He's no good."

"What about Carney?"

"Oh, him. He's no good either."

Captain Mac, a puzzled light in his somber eyes, studied the other narrowly for a moment, then turned away.

"Let's get these men aboard and the loading started, eh?" he said.

ALL that day the loading went on. Captain Mac's men worked easily and steadily and seemingly without really exerting themselves; but, given a gang of natives to do the heavy work, they put dyewood into the *Carib's* hold at a speed that made Larry Woods stare in astonishment, seaman that he was. He had seen accomplished cargo handlers before, and good ones; but never men like these.

Captain Tietjen, of the *Salamander*, had a rather long conference with Tom Carney and at noon got his vessel under way and headed westward, bound probably for the small ports on the coast of the Gulf of Gonave. The McClones' schooner, the *Gannet*, lay between the *Carib* and the wharf. Black Michael, captain of the schooner and elder of the brothers McClone, came aboard Larry's vessel after lunch just as the *Salamander* was wearing around Point Picolet.

Black Michael was a big, black-bearded man, dressed in khaki and wearing a wide-brimmed hat, a faded bandanna knotted about his brown throat; an honest, big-hearted man and an old-timer in the tropics.

"I don't know what this trouble is all about," he said, rolling a ragged black cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, "and what's more, I don't care. Cap'n Mac and Shang Toy are in it—that's enough for me. We've chartered our schooner and crew, including Jem and myself, to Shang, and we've been told to report to Larry Woods for instructions. Here we are. Whatever ye want us to do—it it's honest—that we'll do."

After some discussion he was given orders to depart the following morning for Fort Liberté Bay, and with a roll of his ragged cigar and a grin to Captain Mac went over the rail. The boat shoved off and headed for the *Gannet*, where Jem McClone, Michael's red-bearded brother, was leaning lazily on the rail.

Later in the day a native boat put out from the wharf and came to oars abreast the *Carib*. A man dressed in pongee suit and Panama hat stood up in the sternsheets and hailed in a squeaky falsetto:

"Ahoy, *Carib!* Is that the *Scorpion* just beyond you?"

"That's her, brother," answered Bronson.

The boat went on.

Tom Carney met the man at the rail. Some words passed; then Carney was seen to raise both great fists above his head in rage, stamp furiously across the poop, turn and come back and thump mightily on the rail, while the stranger backed away, protesting feebly and glancing over his shoulder at his waiting boat.

Carney suddenly moved forward softly, swiftly, like a big cat, and with a swing of one arm knocked the stranger flat on his face, then caught him up by one ankle and one wrist and tossed him lightly into the blue water of the bay, whence he was eventually pulled by the astonished boatman. Carney leaned over the poop rail and shook his fists, and his fog-horn voice came down on the wind to the *Carib:*

"You —— quitter! You mangy, yellow hound! You and all the rest can go to ——!"

Scofield came from below, stepped to the rail and laughed loudly at the bedraggled man urging his boatman to make speed with the oars. But Carney swung about, and the expression on his face silenced Scofield and sent him shuffling out of reach.

"Carney's had some kind of a setback," said Bronson gleefully. "He's mad enough to break Scofield in pieces and throw him to the fish. I wish he would!"

"Scofield worries you a lot," remarked Captain Mac, his somber eyes thoughtful.

"He's no good."

Bronson had brought from ashore a wicker basket containing six quart bottles of Barbancourt rum and had been drinking steadily all day. There was an unsteadiness to his walk as, taking a bottle from the cabin skylight, he went forward and accosted a seaman smoking his pipe in the shade of the midships deckhouse.

Captain Mac, a frown on his face, left his deck chair and followed.

"Here, none o' that, Bronson," he said sharply. "These sailors are mine, understand? And they don't drink during working hours—if I see them."

And to the seaman:

"Jenks, give back that bottle. You're to stand anchor watch tonight, and I want you to stand it sober."

Jenks somewhat reluctantly returned the bottle of rum to Bronson, who snorted disgustedly.

"Ain't nobody else will drink with a man," he growled. "Got a coupla abstainers aft."

"You're a fool, Bronson. I drink. Larry drinks. But we don't swim in it. There's a time for drinking. Go ashore and drink, or drink in the cabin; but whatever you do, drink like a gentleman; and don't drink when you ought to be on the job overseeing the loading of the vessel. Besides you've been going to sea for a long time, and you know it doesn't do for an officer to drink with the hands. Shang Toy and I are backing you and Woods to win, but we're not going to spend our time and money on your business while you're guzzling rum with the fo'csle hands."

"I knew it! I knew you'd throw that up to us sooner or later!"

Captain Mac straightened angrily, then caught himself and turned away, shaking his head.

"I think it's the drink talking," he said over his shoulder. "Come and tell me about that when you're sober."

"Ya-a-aa! You do a favor and then go round shoutin' about it!"

Larry Woods stepped from the companion hatchway as the little captain came aft.

"Cap'n Mac, I don't want you to pay any attention to that rotter."

"I'm not. He's drunk."

"Yes; but it's not only that—I'm getting to think he's no good even when he's sober. He and I are due for a split, I think."

"How do you stand financially?" asked Captain Mac.

"Humph! You'd be surprized if you ran over our accounts. We're supposed to be equal partners. In the beginning I had about two-thirds of the cash, and the agreement was that Bronson was to put a certain part of his profits back into the business each month until we were square. But each month when we split what we'd taken in over our expenses, he tells me that he's got debts ashore that must be paid.

"On top of that, he's been borrowing from me right along. I thought he was a good fellow and would square things as soon as he got his debts straightened out; but his debts seem to grow faster than his profits and mine together. I suppose I should have told Shang Toy about that, but I thought that maybe I could bring George around and get him on the right track. But I guess I can't.

"We'll have to split. I've given him a dozen chances, but instead of getting better he gets worse. He owes me more than he put in the business, but I'm willing to tear up his notes and call it square, and maybe give him a couple of hundred besides for a stake."

"I'll say nothing, one way or the other," said Captain Mac, "except that Bronson doesn't seem to be a very helpful partner."

"Helpful! He's a drag!"

CAPTAIN MAC washed his shirt and his white cap-cover and spread them to dry on the cabin skylight, then went below and shaved with Larry's gear. An hour later he came on deck, donned his shirt and cap, called a seaman and had the gig hauled to where the section had been removed from the bulwark to form a gangway.

"I'm going ashore to send a wire and look up some friends," he told Larry.

"I'm going ashore for a while after dinner; suppose I meet you somewhere?"

"Glad to have you. But I won't be back in town till about nine-thirty or ten. If that isn't too late for you, I'll be at Paddy O'Shay's for an hour or so."

"All right, Cap'n Mac; I'll be there."

Captain Mac went ashore. He sent his telegram, met a gendarme whom he knew and went with him to the home of a mutual friend who lived outside the town. At nine-thirty Captain Mac, alone, returned to Cape Hatien, dismissed his hired automobile at Paddy O'Shay's and, entering, asked the Irishman if he had seen Larry Woods.

"No, sorr, he ain't been in yet. But Cap'n Tom Carney was in a bit back, and he had a face on 'im like a hill *caco* startin' out on the warpath. Black and mean it was. 'Tis not me would want to be in his path this night."

"Was he drinking?"

"No-oo; 'twas not the drink. Cap'n Carney ain't what ye'd call a drinkin' man. He was just sulky and mad, or so ut seemed to me."

They had a drink on Cap'n Mac, then one on "the house." They talked. Ten o'clock rolled around. At a quarter after, Captain Mac left his chair and started for the door.

"I'm going back to the *Carib*, Paddy," he said. "If Cap'n Woods comes in tell him where I went. Probably something turned up and kept him aboard."

"Yes, sorr. Good night, sorr."

"Good night, Paddy."

The *Carib's* gig was not at the wharf; only a native boat, with the boatman fighting mosquitoes in his sleep, and a cargo-barge bumping against the spiles at the end. Captain Mac roused the boatman, thrust a *gourde* in his hand and pointed toward the dim white light that marked the stern of the *Carib*. The negro got out his oars, shoved off and began to pull sleepily over the surface of the bay.

The moon had not yet come up, and the sky was so heavily overcast that not a star was visible; the land-locked bay was an expanse of misty ink, slapping gently against the weather side of the boat as the drowsy oarsman plied his oars. The schooner was invisible; all that told of her whereabouts was the smoky oil lamp at her stern; then of a sudden her tall masts, naked against the lowering sky, reached above them, and the boat bumped alongside. Captain Mac stepped to the short pilot ladder, shoved the boat off with his foot and climbed aboard.

He saw no one on deck and started forward to look for the seaman on watch.

He had gone barely ten paces when he came upon a man lying in the waterway. He turned the man over and struck a match. The man was Jenks, the seaman, and he was drunk. He was breathing stertorously and mumbling incoherently. Two quart bottles, one empty and one half full, lay near by, and an overturned deck chair was entangled with Jenks' legs.

"Get up!" barked Captain Mac.

"Aw, g'wan; lemme 'lone," mumbled Jenks and turned over on his other side.

"Get up, you useless scum!"

"W'a'sh matter? Lemme 'lone," and he buried his face in his arm to shut out the glare of the match Captain Mac was holding before his eyes.

Captain Mac gave it up and went aft, and seeing no one on the poop, entered the companion hatchway and felt his way down the narrow wooden ladder to the bottom. At the foot of the ladder he halted and stood gazing into the common room that divided the two sleeping rooms, one on each side of the vessel.

The common room was small, even though it was the largest of the three rooms in the cabin. Opening into it from the port side was Larry Woods' room; and on the starboard side was a room that was now being used by Bronson. In the center was a small rectangular table with four revolving chairs bolted to the cabin floor. An oil lamp bracketed on the after wall was flickering feebly, its chimney black with smoke, and lighting the room dimly with its yellow rays. Larry's door was closed; but the door of the room on the starboard side was partly open and swinging to and fro with the slow roll of the schooner.

The stench of spilled liquor hung heavy in the air, and the remains of a broken bottle crunched beneath Captain Mac's feet as he stepped into the room. He started toward Larry's room, halted and faced toward the room at the other side, from which a dragging sound had come. He walked to the table, leaned over watched the swinging door.

On the edge of the door a hand appeared, low down. In the opening between door and casing appeared a head, unrecognizable in the flickering light; and from the room came crawling a man. He slipped on the threshold, rolled to his side and tried vainly to get upon his hands and knees. He gave it up and with one hand tugged at something about his neck.

Captain Mac darted around the table, caught the man beneath the arms and lifted him to his knees. He saw that which the man was tugging at and tore it loose. It was a necktie, drawn almost tight enough to cause stangulation.

"Larry! What happened?"

Larry's hair was matted, and one side of his face was streaked with blood.

"Hit me on the head—don't know who. Tried to strangle me with necktie," he gasped.

"You don't know who it was?"

"No."

Larry was gulping air and swallowing as if it pained him. Captain Mac helped him to the transom built against the forward wall, helped him stretch out upon it and, getting water, gave him some to drink and bathed his head and face.

"IT HAPPENED about nine-thirty," he said after a while. "I had lain down for a couple of hours' sleep before going ashore, but I overslept, and when I awoke it was twenty-five after nine. I thought it was strange that Bronson hadn't called me. I dressed in a hurry in my room, grabbed my coat and hat and started to go above.

"When I entered this room I saw that the lamp was smoking, and started over to fix it before leaving, but just as I was reaching for it I heard a crash, and down the ladder came Bronson, head over heels and with the neck of a broken bottle in one hand. He got up and staggered across the room, and I saw blood running from a cut on the back of his head, probably where he'd struck something on his way down. I grabbed hold of him and led him into his room, and laid him on his bunk. He was blind drunk, of course, but still had some idea of what he was doing, because he grabbed hold of me and wanted me to stay and have a drink. When I left him he was mumbling something about being knocked down the ladder, but I figured he was half-consciously trying to alibi himself.

"I came into this room and turned down the light and then started up to see what had become of the anchor-watch. Just as I put my foot on the ladder I got an awful crack on the head from above and fell on my face on the floor. Then somebody was on top of me, yanking at my necktie, and the first thing I knew he had it tightened up about my neck so that I couldn't breathe. My good arm was twisted up behind my back, and my other arm was snarled in the sling, so I didn't have a chance to put up a fight. And all the time that —— necktie was getting tighter and tighter. I couldn't see his face, but just before I became unconscious I heard him say—

" 'A necktie's as good for this as a piece of manila is!'

"I managed to twist over then and got my knees in his stomach. But my strength was gone, and I went out. I woke up after a while and tried to get the tie from around my neck, but couldn't. I managed to get on my feet, and made for the ladder, but got mixed up somehow and fell into Bronson's room and went out again. The next thing I knew you were yanking that —— tie from around my neck."

"It's too bad you didn't see him."

"Yes; but I didn't. All I know is, he was very strong, and he seemed big; though he might have looked bigger in the dim light than he really was. One thing is certain, though; it was either Scofield or Carney."

"Do you think Carney would do a thing like that?"

"Wel-ll—hardly. But he's got plenty of cause, you know. If I was put out of the way it would leave him a clear way. I'd say it was Scofield; but what could be his motive? He's only an employee, and I'm sure he doesn't care enough for Carney to commit murder for him. Suppose we rouse out George and see if he knows anything?"

Bronson was awakened with difficulty. Captain Mac raised his head and shoulders and shook him roughly, while Larry doused him with a glassful of water. He spluttered, opened his eyes, cursed foully and demanded to know why they couldn't let a man sleep after he had done a hard day's work.

"You've got a cut on the back of your head," said Captain Mac. "How did you get it?"

"Huh?"

He felt of his head and looked at them stupidly as his mental machinery began to break through the fog that enveloped it.

"Oh, yeah," he muttered. "The —— —— crook jumped out from behind the wheelbox just as I started below and socked me on the back of the nut. What then? I don't remember ——"

"Who stepped out from behind the wheelbox?"

"Scofield, of course. Who else—" he began, then paused and went on quickly. "Well, maybe it wasn't Scofield. I don't know."

"Didn't you see him?"

"Huh? No, I didn't see 'im. It was dark."

"Why do you think it was Scofield?"

"Huh? I didn't say I thought it was Scofield, did I? I said maybe it was him. Maybe it was—I don't know."

"Do you think it was Carney?"

"—— it, I don't know who it was!"

"Bronson, I think you are a liar," said Captain Mac slowly.

"Yeah? You wouldn't get away with that, mister, if I wasn't all bunged up. Me layin' here with a dent in the back o' my head, and you callin' me names! What the —— right have you to butt in anyhow? What happens to me ain't none of your business. G'wan now and lemme sleep."

"You're not going to sleep," said Captain Mac; "you're going to get out of that bunk and help us find the strangler who's been running loose aboard the schooner."

"Strangler! What d'you mean?"

Captain Mac told of Larry's struggle with the unknown man in the cabin.

"Huh! That's funny! And you couldn't make 'im out? He had you down, you say, and suddenly let up an' run? Say, I'll bet ——"

The rawboned seaman's mouth dropped, and a knowing look came to his face.

"Go on," encouraged Captain Mac.

"Huh? Go on what? I was just thinkin' it was funny he got up and run like that when he almost had you out. Maybe it was Carney; huh?"

"We'll soon find out," said the little captain grimly. "We'll see if that drunken Jenks knows anything. Come on, Bronson."

"Yeah; all right."

Bronson slid from his bunk; and, leaving him to bathe his head, Captain Mac and Larry went on deck.

JENKS was in the deck chair, and cockney Allen, the boatswain, having drawn a bucket of water from overside, was calmly pouring it upon his head. Nearby stood Torkel Larken, the huge Danish seaman.

As the cold water struck him Jenks leaped from the chair, grappled with the boatswain, let go and started to run, but fell headlong as Larken tripped him up.

"Drunk on watch, are yer, you scum!" cried the boatswain, bending over the bewildered Jenks. "I'll —— well give yer fits tomorrow, strike me pink 'f I don't!"

The Dane clutched Jenks by the collar, lifted him clear of the deck and shook him so that his limbs seemed trying to part company with his body; then he dropped him into the deck chair and stepped back.

"We got 'im awike at larst, sir," said the boatswain, turning to Captain Mac.

"I want to ask him some questions, Bose."

"Arsk 'im, sir; he can tork—if 'e carn't I'll give 'im another draw-bucketful o' water on his bloomin' coconut."

"Jenks, what happened while you and Mr. Bronson were drinking here?"

Jenks pulled at the lobe of one ear, scratched his head and concentrated fiercely—but futilely. He could not remember anything in particular happening.

The boatswain tossed the draw-bucket overside, bobbed it up and down in the water and hauled it aboard—full. He drew back, took careful aim and looked hopefully toward Captain Mac.

"Bose, I'll break your back if you heave that water," Jenks growled; and then to Captain Mac: "——, Cap'n, I don't know what happened. Seems like nothin' happened. We was just sittin' here sociable-like, drinkin', and we finished one-two, maybe three quarts, and then I don't know any more. Nothin' happened."

"Did you see or hear anybody aboard who didn't belong aboard, Bose?" asked the captain.

"No, sir."

"Where were you?"

"In the fo'csle, sir. Me and Tork and Malley and Mike Brady 'ad a dice game goin'. When it broke up me an' Tork come on deck for a smoke, and we finds this scut snoozin' on watch."

"All right, Bose."

Captain Mac took Larry aside.

"You want to see this thing through, don't you, Larry?"

"You bet I do!"

"That's right. If there is a potential murderer around we want to get hold of him, here and now; and when we do, so help me, we'll hand it to him good and plenty!"

"I'm with you, Cap'n Mac, gimpy arm and all."

"We'll make a clean-up, a thorough one, such a one as will settle this thing once and for all time. It's time we laid our cards on the table and had a showdown."

"That's what, Cap'n. The thing to do first is to find the man who tried to choke me to death with my necktie."

"We'll find him. It may not be easy, though. You haven't any enemies ashore, have you?"

"None that I know of."

"All right; we'll eliminate the possibility of any one coming from ashore. We'll also eliminate the *Gannet*. That leaves the *Carib* and the *Scorpion*. There's no reason why we should suspect any of my men, but we'll make sure."

He called across the deck to the boatswain—

"There were four of you in that crap game; eh, Bose?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Jenks makes five. Where was the other sailor?"

"In 'is bunk, sir."

"And where was the cook and the mess-boy?"

"In their bunks, sir."

"Did any one leave the fo'csle before the game broke up?"

"No, sir. Me and Tork Larken was the first to come on deck."

"That lets out the crew of the *Carib*," said Captain Mac, turning back to Larry. "The bosun has been with me a long time, and I know I can take his word. Jenks was drunk, no doubt about that, so we can leave him out. You know where Bronson was.

"Now, the *Scorpion*. I think we can eliminate the sailors right off. There is no reason why one of them should come over and do such a thing on his own initiative, and Carney would hardly put any of them up to it for fear of it getting out afterward. If Carney wanted to commit a murder, it seems to me he would do it himself rather than let some one else in on it."

"I don't think it was Carney," said Larry doubtfully. "I don't think he's as bad as that."

"I don't say he is; but there's no one left but him and Scofield. And if Scofield did it, what could be his motive? On the other hand, there is Carney's character; you say you don't think murder and sneaking about in the dark is in his line."

"No, I do not."

"Perhaps you're right. Let's go and find out. Come on."

"What—what do you mean?" gasped Larry.

"We'll go rouse out Carney and Scofield and have a showdown."

"You mean have them arrested—get the gendarmes?"

"Gendarmes—no! You and I will go. And we'll take Bronson, so we can all lay down our cards together."

"My ——, you've got your nerve with you!" exclaimed Larry. "Carney'll go wild. But I'm game."

While Larry was explaining to Bronson, who had just come from below, Captain Mac had the boatswain and Larken haul the gig alongside.

"You and Tork go with us, Bose," said Captain Mac, "and get Malley, too."

The moon had risen, and it came out from behind a cloud as the six men went over the side and into the gig. They shoved off, and with Larken at the oars and the boatswain at the tiller the heavily laden boat crept slowly across the surface of the harbor, which was like a great sheet of crinkly tinfoil in the moonlight.

"There's a light moving about aboard the *Gannet*, sir," said the sharp-eyed Dane at the oars, "and a boat going over the side, I think."

"So there is," said Captain Mac, shifting about on the thwart to look astern at the McClones' schooner. "The McClones must have seen us, and are coming to take a hand. I wish they would stay away—they'll make the odds too lopsided against Carney."

"The more the better," put in Bronson. "You'll need all the help you can get when you go up against Carney. This is a fool thing to do anyhow, if you ask me."

"Nobody is asking you," remarked Larry.

"No; but you made me come along. —— it, it's a crazy thing to do! What d'you say we call it off, huh?"

Captain Mac and Larry exchanged glances, and the former gave Bronson a curious, puzzled look, but neither answered.

As the boat slid alongside Carney's beautiful schooner, a head popped over the rail and a gruff voice demanded what they wanted.

"We want you first," answered Captain Mac, swinging himself aboard.

"You want me? What d'you want me for?"

The seaman thrust out his chin belligerently, and another seaman, who had been sitting upon a hatch, put down his pipe and came forward.

Captain Mac snapped out a low order. The first seaman went down before the rush of the boatswain and Malley, the ex-pugilist; Larken wrapped his big arms about the other and thrust him back upon the hatch.

"We didn't come here to harm you men," said Captain Mac in a low voice; "we came for information. Keep quiet and answer promptly, and nothing will happen to you. How long have you been on deck?"

"What's it to you?" retorted the seaman who had looked over the rail.

"You had better answer," warned the little captain grimly. "Which one of you is on watch?"

"I am."

"Since six o'clock, eh? Have you been on deck all that time?"

"Where else would I be?"

"Where is Mr. Scofield?"

"Below—in 'is bunk, I guess."

"Are you sure?"

"No, I ain't sure. Maybe he's sleepin' in a clothes locker. How the —— do I know?"

"Don't try to be funny. I mean are you sure he's below?"

"Well, I'm —— sure he ain't here."

"He isn't ashore, eh?"

"Not unless 'e swam. We on'y put one boat in the water, and Cap'n Carney's had that all night."

"Mr. Scofield hasn't been off the schooner since six o'clock; is that it?"

"He ain't been off 'er since about noon."

"Has Cap'n Carney returned from ashore?"

"Yeah, he's back. He came aboard about ten o'clock."

"How about this other man—has he been on deck with you all evening?"

"Naw; he's on'y been here about ten minutes. He's standin' by to relieve me at eight bells—it's five of now."

"So Mr. Scofield hasn't been off the vessel. But if he went over the stern you wouldn't be able to see him from here, would you?"

"You can see for yerself, can't you?"

Captain Mac turned to Larry.

"You see, Larry, it must have been Carney. This man says Scofield hasn't been off the vessel, and I believe he's telling the truth; or at least he thinks he is. We seem to have eliminated everybody but Carney."

"It looks that way," admitted Larry somewhat reluctantly.

It occurred to Captain Mac that Scofield, not being a seaman, might not be able to row, and he put the question to the sailor.

"Naw," answered the man, grinning, "he can't handle a boat. O' course he can dig the oars in the water and pull on 'em; but 'e don't know where 'e's goin' or when 'e's goin' to get there. He ain't no seaman. He can't tie 'is own shoe-laces."

"That makes it look more like Carney," said Captain Mac, turning to Larry.

"What the ——'s it all about anyhow?" inquired the man Larken was holding, speaking to the boatswain.

"Oh, some bloke snuck up on Cap'n Woods an' tried to choke 'im to death in the dark——"

"Shut up, you idiot!" snapped Captain Mac; and the boatswain, shamefaced, subsided.

The *Gannet's* boat bumped alongside, and Black Michael, followed by Jem, the red-bearded one, climbed over the rail and dropped to the deck.

"We saw your boat makin' for the *Scorpion*," said Black Michael, "and we thought we might as well be in on whatever was goin' to happen. We figured ye wouldn't be makin' a social call at midnight. If there's any fightin' to be done we'd take it kindly if you'd tell us where to start. I haven't had a good fight since the time Jem and I fought each other for eight months straight. Ye remember the time, no doubt, Cap'n Mac? Sure and it was you that showed us what —— fools we were."

"I remember," said the little captain, smiling faintly. "But this is a more difficult matter, Michael."

He quickly told all that had happened and of how he had concluded that Carney was the man who had assaulted Bronson and Larry.

"Sure then rouse 'im out," rumbled Black Michael, tugging thoughtfully at his beard. "Maybe it was Carney, and maybe it wasn't. I don't know the man."

"Neither do I. I think we had better rouse out Scofield first, and after we give him a thorough questioning we'll send for Carney."

"It's a lot of —— foolishness, that's what I say," put in Bronson, looking hopefully at the McClones. "Don't you think so, Mr. McClone? Don't you think we ought to let well enough alone? Huh, don't you?"

"No, I don't," said Black Michael.

"Nor do I," agreed Jem. "I think we ought to get the black-hearted hound and wring his neck."

"You'll have a sweet time wringin' Tom Carney's neck, as big as you are," growled Bronson.

Captain Mac ordered the two seamen released, and sent one of them below to call Jake Scofield.

"Scofield, mind you, not Cap'n Carney," warned Captain Mac.

"Aw, all right," grumbled the man, starting aft; "I heard you the first time."

He reached the poop, entered the hatchway and disappeared.

"If we must rouse 'im out we ought to do it ourselves," protested Bronson.

Captain Mac shook his head.

"No; I want to talk to them separately," he answered.

"Suit yourself; but you're givin' Jake Scofield a chance to slip a gun under his coat before he comes on deck. You don't know Scofield—he's one bad egg. He's not as handy with his mitts as Carney by a million miles, but he's a —— sight more dangerous when he's got a gat slung under his arm. He'd shoot his brother for a gold collar button."

"You know him well, eh?"

"Huh? No, I don't know 'im well. But I—I heard about the ——"

Treading as softly as possible upon the yellow pine planks, they all went aft, gathered about the companion hatchway and waited for the appearance of Scofield.

The sky had cleared, and the surface of the bay was all adance with the moonlight. The two schooners to leeward were penciled in silver against the dark loom of the land. Eight bells rang softly aboard the *Gannet*, and as the last soft note died the *Carib* picked it up. The cockney boatswain stepped instinctively to the front of the wheelbox, put out his hand and looked at Captain Mac, who nodded absently; and midnight was made aboard the *Scorpion*. The trade wind purled in the rigging. All was soft and low and warm and gentle.

AND then from below came the sound of a scuffle, a growl of rage, a cry of fear; the sound of heavy, sure feet mounting the companion ladder, and out of the hatchway came a great, broad figure, and he was holding by the scuff of the neck, dragging after him like a sack of meal, the seaman who had been sent below to call Scofield. The big man was Tom Carney, in undershirt and trousers, and his eyes were ablaze with fury as he swung the seaman in front of him and propelled him forward.

"So!" His voice was a deep rumble. "I am a strangler! Point out to me the man who says Tom Carney is a sneak and a strangler!"

Still holding the seaman so tightly by one arm that the man winced and cringed, Carney leaned slightly forward, hunching his great shoulders and lowering his head like a bull about to charge. He was on his toes, his feet well spread; his deep chest rose and fell, and the muscles of his arms and shoulders swelled and strained as he tried to hold himself in check. His jaws were set like rock; and his lips, partly open, revealed short, broad teeth tightly clenched.

"Speak up, scum! Point him out!"

The man, gasping with pain, lifted a hand and pointed at Captain Mac, then squirmed free and darted off as Carney loosened his hold.

"So!" Carney turned his hot gaze on the somber, calm little man who stood, his hands in his pockets, his cap on the back of his head, fifteen feet away. "One-Two Mac! So, you are the man who says I am a sneak and a strangler!"

Sensing that Carney was about to spring, the McClones and Malley, born fighters, moved forward to get between him and Captain Mac.

"Steady, Carney," warned Captain Mac, his voice tantalizingly low and calm. "Some one knocked Bronson down a ladder and tried to strangle Cap'n Woods, and we are here to see if you know anything about it. Frankly we suspect you—you and Scofield. We may be wrong. If we are, we'll apologize like men, or give you whatever satisfaction we think is due you, and go back where we came from. We're laying our cards on the table, you see, and we're going to play them out. It's a showdown, Carney, and there'll be no misunderstanding when we leave."

"A showdown, is it? Good! One-Two Mac, I'm going to break you in two!"

He sprang—but was met head on by Malley and the two McClones. The four men went down in a whirling, fighting mass, rolled over and over and brought up in the waterway.

Then out of that mass rose a great mountain of a man who kicked and flung about till he was free. Malley, the ex-pugilist, had broken his hand on Carney's jaw and was out of the fight for good. Jem McClone lay senseless on deck, and Black Michael was twisted under his brother in such a way that he could not immediately get up.

"Steady, Carney!" came that clear, tantalizing voice from across the deck.

But there was no staying Carney now. Larry threw himself forward but, impeded by his injured arm, could not grapple, and went down before the big man's lumbering but swift rush. A downward, clublike blow struck the stocky boatswain on the muscles of the neck and seemed to paralyze him; he staggered off in a circle like a cripple who has been deprived of his crutches. Only Larken, the Danish seaman, remained between Carney and Captain Mac.

Carney did not swerve or hesitate; straight ahead he went, head lowered, feet pounding the deck, like an angry rhinoceros in full charge. The huge Dane met him half way, wrapped both arms around him, tried to force him to a halt. An enormous, square fist swung in a short arc and buried itself to the wrist in the Dane's stomach.

Larken grunted; his head jerked forward so that his shock of yellow hair flopped down over his forehead; his mouth opened wide as he gasped to replace the air that had been driven from his lungs. He pressed both hands to his midriff, dropped to the deck, drew his knees up to his chin and rolled upon his side, groaning and gasping.

"Carney," snapped Captain Mac, holding up one hand, "get hold of yourself, man. Do you hear——"

A terrific smash to the side of the head drove him to the deck. He doubled into a ball and rolled over and over till he was clear, then came to his feet, crouched and measured the distance between himself and Carney.

Captain Mac's manner was not calm now. His eyes were hot with rage, and one side of his mouth was drawn up in a leering grimace. Between his eyes his brows were knotted and puckered.

He flung himself upon Carney, and it was as if a tame house cat had suddenly changed into a raging tiger. His long arms swung with a speed too great to be followed, and his fists drove again and again to Carney's face and body, bewildering him, causing him involuntarily to give ground.

But Carney was a real fighting man and not so easily to be beaten, and the odds were heavily in his favor. He lowered his head again and rushed—and again Captain Mac went to the deck before him. He was up and fighting in a few seconds, but again went down, and this time did not rise so quickly.

Larken was still groaning upon the deck. Malley was sitting upon the hatch, profanely growling over his broken hand. The cockney boatswain was leaning weakly against the wheelbox.

Jake Scofield had come from below and now stood half in and half out of the hatchway, seemingly undecided as to what part he should play in the scene before him. Larry was coming toward Carney. Jem McClone was being helped to his feet by Bronson, and Black Michael was coming to join Larry.

Captain Mac was on his hands and knees. He shook his head to clear the fog from his brain, and climbed to his feet. But this time he did not dash forward toward Carney; instead he walked backward slowly to the rail. When his shoulder-blades touched the rail he spread wide his feet, put his head on one side and calmly and thoughtfully studied Carney, as if he had never observed him before.

Larry and Black Michael, puzzled by the little captain's peculiar actions, halted, looked at each other, at Carney, then back to Captain Mac. Was it all over? Had One-Two Mac, the famous bucko, been beaten? Neither of them had ever seen him in action before tonight, though they had heard much of him, and they were wondering if the tales they had heard had not been greatly expanded in the telling.

One thing was certain: One-Two Mac had been knocked down three times within as many minutes. They had not given a thought to the possibility of Captain Mac beating Carney, of course; Carney had fifty pounds the advantage in weight, was much stronger and no doubt tougher; but they had thought the little man would give a better account of himself than he had. And they had always heard it said that Captain Mac preferred fighting big men to small ones. Had the little sea bucko quit?

No; they suddenly knew that he hadn't. He was taking off his coat; and as he turned toward them after placing it on a bitt they saw that his mouth was again drawn up in his one-sided fighting smile; otherwise his lean face was expressionless, and his eyes were as cold and hard as chilled steel. He tightened his belt, bent and tied additional knots in the laces of his shoes, straightened and walked unhurriedly toward Carney, waiting in the center of the space abaft the cabin skylight.

"Larry—Michael; don't interfere, and don't let any one else interfere; just stand by—and watch," he said; and his voice was a soft, contented purr.

Without seeming to set himself, aim or measure distance, he whirled and drove his fist to Carney's face. Carney's head went back; then he growled and set himself for the blow that had sent Captain Mac to the deck thrice before. But this time he missed; the little shipmaster was out of reach—and in again; and this time he struck three times before he slipped away.

The fight that followed is one of the oft-told tales of the Caribbean. Captain Mac was a will-o'-the-wisp that could not be caught or struck squarely. He was in and out, in and out, a darting, flashing fantom, and often he struck as many as six blows—*one-two, one-two, one-two*—before the slower-moving Carney could set himself for one of his mighty swings—and then the little shadow was away, dodging, circling, keeping Carney continually shifting and off his balance. Sometimes Captain Mac's head was thrust forward, giving him the appearance of being nearer than he was; at other times he would lean backward and seem to be out of reach when he was really within striking distance.

For a big man Carney was fast; but he was a lumbering hulk compared to the lightning-like fighting machine before him. His blows were heavy, crushing ones, but they didn't always land; and when they did they landed upon a target that was going with them, rolling them off, robbing them of their force.

Captain Mac went about his task in a workmanlike manner. He had set himself the job of cutting down a big, enormously strong man who was game to the core, and he knew it could not be done in a minute or two. He had not the weight to knock out with a single blow such a man as Carney; he would have to wear him down gradually till he was disabled.

He devoted most of his attention to Carney's brows, cutting and slashing at them with his sharp knuckles till the blood was streaming into the big man's eyes and blinding him. Then he shifted his attention to the nose, smashed it, battered it over to one side, shortened Carney's breathing and forced him to open his mouth. He knew that Carney, with his teeth clenched and his jaw muscles taut, could not be knocked out by a blow on the chin or jawbone; but with his mouth open there was a chance.

A half hour passed, and Carney began to slow up. It takes the heart and strength from a man to swing and miss, and to feel that when he does not miss he is hitting nothing but a shadow. And little One-Two Mac was now a shadow indeed; for Carney, his brows puffed and swollen and his eyes full of blood, was half blind. And always those stabbing, cutting hands were slashing at his tortured face, which was now a red mass of pulp and ribbons.

And always One-Two Mac was at him, from the side, the front, from beneath his guard or reaching over it, coldly inevitable, never pausing, never faltering. He swung and jabbed from all angles, some of them seemingly impossible, and with dazzling speed and unerring accuracy.

And he knew so many disconcerting tricks, tricks that kept Carney constantly bewildered and caused him to spend his strength without result. Time and again he put his fist in the crook of Carney's elbow as the big man drew back for a swing, stopping the blow before it started; again he would clutch Carney's wrist, jerk him forward, and with his free hand drive several blackjack-like blows to face or body; several times he caught Carney's arm as the latter came rushing in, turned him aside and sent him crashing against the rail or skylight.

Captain Mac shifted his attack to the body and began to sink his fists with monotonous regularity into Carney's stomach just above the waistline. Carney, his nose being unfit for the purpose for which it was intended, was finding breathing difficult. In addition he was tiring fast; his muscles were big, and beginning to bind; in a long fight excessive muscular strength is a handicap. His legs weakened first, as legs have a habit of doing when the rest of the body is hard pressed; several times he stumbled, and once would have fallen in the waterway had he not thrown an arm over the rail in time to save himself. Still he fought on doggedly, grimly, fighting in the only way he knew how, doing his best, as was his way.

Captain Mac suddenly dropped his hands and stepped away.

"Do you quit?" he asked—and could have bitten off his tongue as the word "quit" slipped from his lips.

"Quit? No—no—no!" rumbled Carney through his ragged lips.

"I didn't mean that. I know you wouldn't quit. You're too good a man, Carney. You've shown you're not a quitter. You are the toughest and gamest man I've ever fought—and if you'll take my word for it that's quite a compliment. We'll just call it off, eh? What do you say, Tom Carney ——"

But Carney was at him, and the few seconds' rest had given him back some of his great strength and stamina. He rushed; and as always, the little fighter man faded away before him; and there began again that merciless slashing and hacking and that fierce pounding of his aching body.

Carney's new strength drained from him quickly. His feet felt as if they were weighted with diving shoes. His arms seemed tremendously heavy. His head dropped forward; his shoulders sank; he fell into a crouch from which he could not straighten.

"You won't accept my offer to call it off, Carney," said Captain Mac, "and so I'm going to finish you as quickly and painlessly as possible."

The little man's thin, hard mouth had straightened and somehow softened; he was no longer smiling his leering fighting smile. His eyes were no longer stony and cold; they were now warm with admiration and feeling for the big, stout-hearted man who did not know how to quit.

He moved in swiftly and silently like a well-oiled machine, and his left fist flashed twice to Carney's heart. The big man groaned, then gathered all his fading strength and flailed wildly with both huge arms, and they stood almost toe to toe in the center of the deck.

But there could be but one result. Carney was but a shell; he was out on his feet, but in the grip of fight madness, and would not go down. His blows were still heavy; but they were slow and no longer dangerous. They were now merely push punches.

And all the time Captain Mac was in close, driving short, lifting shock blows to heart and chin—not the supposed-to-be vulnerable "point of the chin," which is really the strongest part of the jaw, but to the *side* of the chin. A blow to the side of the chin is a jarring, wrenching one that numbs the brain and causes unconsciousness. This was what Captain Mac was striving for. He had Carney's jaw hanging loosely with the muscles tired and relaxed, and he was keeping him bent over with body blows until he could land properly.

He stepped suddenly back, let a sweeping swing go harmlessly by, shoved Carney half around with one hand and drove his other to the big man's jaw. Carney stumbled, went to his knees and steadied himself with his finger tips on the deck.

Slowly he arose, and again Captain Mac sent his fist to the jaw. Again Carney rose and went down. Five times Carney struggled painfully to his feet, and as he did so the fifth time Captain Mac turned his back and strode to the far end of the poop.

"Michael McClone, put a stop to this!" he cried. "I can't do it. I'm afraid I'll kill him. Throw yourself on that madman and hold him tight."

Black Michael sprang to Carney, caught him about the waist and held him back. The big man was still in a crouch, his eyes closed, and his arms were swinging at an opponent he imagined was still before him. He knew not where he was, what he was doing, nor why; but some animal instinct within kept him on his feet and made him thresh the empty air with his leaden arms. He was moaning, sobbing, laughing, cursing, as three of them lifted him and carried him, still drunk with the fight madness, into the hatchway and below.

"My ——!" exclaimed Larry. He was looking with unbelieving eyes at the face of his watch. "Fifty minutes! Fifty minutes they fought! And all the time my Adam's apple was sliding up and down in my throat like the plunger of a pump."

CAPTAIN MAC, his head hanging, was leaning limply against the rail. He was breathing heavily; his face was drawn; and where it was not streaked with blood was as white as paper. His hands were trembling, and his thin lips were quivering nervously.

"A horrible mistake!" he groaned. "I was all wrong. Carney's not the man we were looking for. He's no strangler. I made a terrible mistake!"

"It was my fault too—" began Larry.

"No; it was my fault. All mine. I'll never forgive myself. Never! The way I slaughtered that fine, big man! But what could I do? I couldn't knock him out. And he wouldn't quit. If I had only been forty or fifty pounds heavier!"

"Well, it's over and done. Nothing we can do will undo it."

"No—nothing," murmured Captain Mac, slowly shaking his head.

He paced several times from end to end of the poop, then paused, glanced thoughtfully at the cabin hatchway, strode to it, entered and went down the ladder.

Tom Carney was lying on the cabin transom, and the McClones, having applied balsam to his mangled face, were busy with rolls of bandage.

"I'll not try to set your broken nose," Black Michael was saying. "And some of those gashes on your face'll have to be stitched. Ye'd better let a doctor look ye over in the mornin'."

Carney nodded and, looking up, saw Captain Mac standing at the foot of the ladder. For a moment their glances clashed, and Carney half rose, then fell back and stared unseeingly at the ceiling.

"Carney," said Captain Mac, coming to the side of the transom, "I've come to say that I am sorry. Of course it won't make you feel any better, but it's all I can do."

Carney said nothing.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am. I'll never forgive myself ——"

"Don't cry over me," rumbled Carney, and there was a light in his eyes that said the valiant spirit within was still unbroken. "I can take a beating. I'm strong and tough, and I'll get over it in no time. You licked me fair and square. You didn't use a single foul trick——"

"Neither did you."

"No. I never do, One-Two Mac. I fight clean. And anyway the fault was partly mine. My temper got the best of me."

"I knew the minute you spoke that you couldn't be the man we were looking for. I didn't know you before, you see."

"And I didn't know you except by sight; somebody pointed you out to me once in Port-au-Prince. I should have turned to and helped you find the man you were looking for, but I couldn't think straight. When that sailor came to me and told me that a man on deck accused me of being a sneak and a strangler I went mad. That was the straw that broke the —— donkey's back. I'm licked, coming and going. The licking you gave me tops it off."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you and Woods and Shang Toy, especially Shang Toy, have driven me out of Haiti. You've won. I'll get out as soon as I can find a buyer for my schooners."

"But—but ——"

"Oh, it isn't just because I got licked in a fist fight; I've been licked in every way. You thought I had plenty of financial backing—and I had till you and Shang Toy and the McClones threw your weight against me. You overwhelmed me, made the fight one-sided.

"My backers have developed a yellow streak and want to hedge. The steamship company agent was aboard this afternoon—or yesterday afternoon, rather. He said that the outlook didn't warrant his company advancing me any more money. My schooners are mortgaged to the last plank. I threw the agent over the side and told him he and his people could go to ——. I'll be lucky if I can find a buyer. Ships are not selling like they were two years ago, you know. After I pay off the mortgage I'll not have enough left to buy a plate of beans.

"It's a shame, too; I had a wonderful opportunity here. There's plenty of freight for two schooners on this coast. Besides, there's Santo Domingo, and the Haitians to be taken over to Cuba every sugar-cane season. It's the fighting each other that did it. The way Woods and I were doing, neither of us could make a living."

"That's what," agreed Captain Mac.

"It wasn't my fault," said Carney vehemently. "I didn't start it. Woods started it. He thought there wouldn't be enough cargoes for both of us. He tried to squeeze me out. And he didn't fight fair. He surprized me, Woods; I thought he was all right when I first came to Haiti. I thought we'd get along first rate. When I found out that he tried to burn the *Scorpion* I could hardly believe it."

"He didn't try to burn your schooner, Carney; I'm sure of that," protested Captain Mac.

"So am I," put in Black Michael.

"Scofield saw him and Bronson sneaking away after he discovered the fire. He was too busy putting out the flames to go after them," argued Carney.

"Scofield saw them, eh?"

"Yes. And then we began to battle for fair. I'll admit it, we both fought dirty after that. But he started it—and finished it too, by George. I don't blame you and Shang, though. You thought you were on the right side of the fence, I suppose. But you hadn't heard my side of the story, do you see?"

"I guess you're right, Carney. But Larry Woods thought he was telling the story straight. There's something strange about this thing; I can't make it out."

"Well, no matter. I'm done. My people were willing and anxious to back me when I looked like a winner; but who wants to back a loser? That old Chinaman, Shang Toy, might do it if he thinks the under dog is in the right, but nobody else that I know of would. I'll get out of Haiti."

"And then what?"

"Home—the States, of course. What else? I've got a wife in the States. She just came out of a hospital, crippled for life. They say she needs a change, and I was going to bring her here. But not now. I'll have to go back and look for a job. I've got two kids too," he added. "You see, I can't fight on as long as I'd like to. The odds are too great for a married man."

He sighed wearily.

"Carney, there's something beneath all this that I don't understand. It's not your fault that things have gone wrong, and it's not Larry's. I can't make it out."

"No matter. It's over now."

Captain Mac looked at the big man thoughtfully.

"Maybe—maybe—" he began, then shook his head and started for the ladder.

"I'm going, Carney. Good-by."

"So long, One-Two Mac. No hard feelings, remember."

"I'm glad of that," answered Captain Mac, and went up the ladder.

SCOFIELD, a cigaret between his lips, was sitting silently upon a corner of the skylight, and he had the air of a man who is watching and listening. The boatswain, Malley and Larken, the last named very sick from the blow he had received in the stomach, were waiting by the boat at the gangway. Larry and Bronson were standing by the taffrail, and to them the little captain went.

"Larry," he said, "you're all right, and Carney's all right; but there's some one mixed up in this thing who isn't." He lowered his voice. "I think that when we get hold of the man who tried to strangle you we'll have the one who started all the trouble between you and Carney."

"That's just what I've been thinking," answered Larry. "I'll not be satisfied till it's all cleared up."

"Humph!" snorted Bronson. "You'd better leave well enough alone, that's what I think."

The two McClones came from below, and Black Michael, a big cigar in one corner of his mouth, came over and said to Larry:

"Woods, I'm through. Jem and I are going to take the *Gannet* back to the south coast. We're stepping out, do you understand? We've got nothing against you, but we've got nothing against Carney either, and we're not goin' to help grind a good man under foot just for a bit of charter money. I only wish we had known Carney before."

"That's right," put in Jem. "We're sorry we came in with ye—not that there's anything wrong with you, but Carney's too decent a man to be jumped on by everybody in the Black Republic. We've a contract with Shang Toy, but we'll break it and take a chance—though I don't think he'll try to hold us to it when he finds out why we don't want to carry it through."

"I don't blame you," said Larry. "You're right. For that matter we're all of us right—you, Shang Toy, Cap'n Mac, Carney and I, I think. There's something wrong somewhere, but I'll be darned if I know what or where it is."

"We'll find out when we find the man who knocked you out and tried to cut off your wind with your necktie," said Captain Mac.

"Yes; and who could it have been?" said Larry, pursing his lips and frowning; and he murmured thoughtfully, "A necktie is as good for this as a piece of manila hemp."

Captain Mac, who had been putting on his coat, started and stared at Larry, then reached out and caught him by the arm.

"What's that?" he demanded, a glitter of excitement in his somber eyes. "Repeat what you just said."

"What? Oh, that. But I told you about that."

"Never mind; say it again."

"Well, when he had me down on the floor, tightening the necktie about my neck, he said, 'A necktie is as good for this as a piece of manila hemp.'"

"That exactly what he said, eh? Word for word?"

"Yes—exactly."

Captain Mac finished putting on his coat, then turned and looked out over the bay, all molten silver beneath the moon.

"Well, what d'you say?" growled Bronson. "Ain't we lost enough sleep? Let's get off this —— wagon."

Scofield arose from the skylight, lifted his hands above his head in a stretch and yawned sleepily.

"You're losin' more sleep the longer you stay," he said, grinning as he turned away.

"Say, that's a funny thing!" suddenly exclaimed Larry, who had been thinking deeply. "Listen here, Cap'n Mac, how do you suppose he came to say manila ——"

He stopped as he saw the little man's warning gesture. Captain Mac was studying Scofield, who had strolled to the wheelbox and leaned his elbows upon it.

Captain Mac suddenly turned upon Bronson, took his arm and led him out of Scofield's hearing.

"Say, Bronson, the time Larry had the fight with Carney— 'Er, did you see it?"

"No," answered Bronson, surprized at the question.

"But Larry told you about it, eh? Tell me how it was."

"——, Larry told you about it, didn't he?"

"Well, yes, but I want to hear you tell it."

"Humph! I don't know what the ——'s the matter with you," growled Bronson, but he went on to tell the little captain the details of Larry's encounter with Carney.

"I see," said the captain as he finished. "Now tell me about—er—the time the *Scorpion* caught on fire."

"——, I don't know anything about it."

"That's all right; tell what you know."

Bronson told what little he knew about the fire aboard Carney's schooner. For ten minutes Captain Mac kept him talking aimlessly, jumping from one subject to another and arriving nowhere.

"H'm. I see," said the captain at last.

He looked out over the water, then said suddenly out of the corner of his mouth—

"Where's Scofield?"

"Why—there he is," answered Bronson, pointing.

"Where?"

Bronson pointed again.

Captain Mac turned squarely toward Scofield, still leaning on the wheel box, some distance away.

"Is that Scofield?"

"Sure it is," growled Bronson, looking at the little captain in wonderment. "He's watchin' us too. He's got an eye for everything that goes on."

"He has, eh?"

"Yes. Say, what the ——'s the matter with you? Have you gone off your nut? What're you standin' here boxin' the compass with me for?"

Captain Mac did not answer; instead he beckoned to Black Michael.

"Michael," he said as the black-bearded schooner captain came over to them, "stand here by Bronson, and if he moves or speaks above a whisper, plant one on the side of his chin."

"What!"

"Do as I say, Michael, and you'll understand why in a few minutes."

Black Michael rolled his cigar to the other corner of his mouth and squinted at Bronson.

"Ye're to be still and quiet, mister," he said, "or I'll be forced to carry out my instructions."

Captain Mac started toward Scofield, who straightened from the wheelbox as he saw him coming. There was suspicion in the square-faced man's eyes, and his arms were crossed on his chest so that his right hand was within his coat.

"I want to tell you something, Scofield."

"Yeah? What d'you wanta tell me?"

He was backing around the wheelbox, putting it between himself and Captain Mac.

"Just this: The game's up!"

"Huh? What d'you mean?"

"Well—" the little captain leaned forward, his finger tips on the edge of the box—"Bronson let the cat out of the bag. He confessed.'"

"He did, did he? And what—what ——'

"Yes—he told me all about you."

"The ——!"

Scofield moved quickly, and there was the flash of polished steel in the moonlight. Captain Mac leaped clean over the wheelbox and drove his shoulder into Scofield's stomach as the revolver spurted twice.

Jem McClone, who had catfooted around behind Scofield, clutched the square-faced man around the waist and slammed him to the deck, then kicked the revolver from his hand and out of reach. Across the deck Black Michael had thrown Bronson flat on his face and was twisting from his hand a wicked-looking automatic.

"He squealed, did he?" panted Scofield, struggling to get from under Black Michael. "I though that's what the —— was doin' when you and him was talkin' over there. The dirty crook! But I ain't goin' to the pen alone, I tell you that. He had as much to do with croakin' that guy as I did."

"What guy?" asked Cap'n Mac quickly.

"That bank messenger in N' Yawk. Ain't that what he was tellin' you? Didn't he say I did it?"

"That's what he said. Said he'd sign a statement too."

"Yeah? He'll sign it with steel cuffs on his wrists then. He had as much to do with it as I had. He had more to do with it than I had!" His voice rose to a hoarse scream. "It was him that fired the shot!"

"Shut up, you ——" began Bronson; but Black Michael ground his face on the deck and forced him into silence.

"He says you're a liar, Scofield," said Captain Mac.

"Yeah? A liar, am I? And he's a angel, ain't he? "Who is it's been robbin' Woods right along? It ain't me."

"You had something to do with it though. He told me all about it."

"What'id he say? Huh? Blamed it all on me, huh? Why, —— it, it was his idea in the first place."

"It was, eh? That's what I thought, Scofield. I thought he was trying to paint himself white and you black. I tell you what, suppose you and Michael and I go below and straighten this thing out? I've heard his side of the story; now I want to hear your side; with both sides we'll be able to give you a square deal. Come on, Michael, let him up.

"Now, Scofield, down the ladder, and we'll hear what you have to say for yourself. And make it snappy, because I want to go ashore, hire an automobile and get started for Port-au-Prince."

LATE that afternoon Captain Mac sat in the little room behind Shang Toy's curio shop. Across from him sat the old Chinaman on his mat, and between them there was a small stand upon which were two tiny glasses of warm rice whisky.

"I know your advice is good, little man," said Shang Toy, "and I shall do whatever you say."

"I am glad," said Captain Mac. "I knew you would do it if I convinced you it was the proper thing to do. It's not only just, but it's good business as well."

"Consider it done," and he nodded solemnly. "But first perhaps you will explain how it came about?"

"Yes. Well, there was Carney fighting Woods and Woods fighting Carney; and last night I found they were both decent, honest men who each had a secret liking for the other. There was no reason why they should be trying to smash each other; still there they were, trying to do that very thing. I knew there was an unknown cause beneath the surface, but couldn't dig it out till last night, just as we were about to leave the *Scorpion.*

"It was Larry who gave me the clew. He told me for the second time what he had heard the unknown assassin mutter in the *Carib's* cabin—

'A necktie is as good for this as a piece of manila hemp.' "

"You mean that you had heard Scofield use that expression before?"

"No; I didn't know Scofield; hadn't heard him speak a dozen words. All I knew about him was what Larry and Bronson had told me."

"Intuition then?"

"No; an absolute certainty. The man who spoke those words could be no one else but Scofield. But wait; I'll come to that. I knew it was Scofield, but I had to prove it. And I knew Bronson knew more about him than any one else; his actions all along told me that, and I knew there was a secret between them. So I took Bronson aside, where Scofield could see me talking to him, and did my best to act like I was hearing something important about Scofield.

"Every once in a while I'd look around at him, point to him, and make Bronson point to him. I knew they were suspicious and afraid of each other and took a chance on Scofield getting the idea that Bronson was squealing to me. He got the idea, just as I thought he would, and when I started toward him and told him that the game was up, he lost his head, fired at Bronson and then, when we collared him, told everything he knew about Bronson, to get even. Of course he didn't tell any more than he had to about himself, but I found out about him from Bronson later. I worked one against the other, do you see?

"Bronson and Scofield are both crooks; they've been crooks all their lives probably. Bronson used to be mate in a freighter that ran regularly to Panama, and each trip he'd bring up a batch of cocain and give it to Scofield to peddle in New York. Scofield never went to sea; he knew the ins and outs in New York, and he made a good partner for Bronson.

"After a while they became more bold. They wanted bigger returns. Bronson quit his mate's job, and together they tried to hold up a bank messenger in the financial district. They bungled the job and had to shoot the messenger to get away. They came to Haiti.

"They heard that the messenger had died from the wound, and each began to blame it on the other; each claims that the other fired the shot. I don't know which it was that fired, and I don't care. Anyway they fell out, had a couple of fights and became enemies.

"Then Larry came to Haiti. He had been shipmates with Bronson during the war and thought he was a good fellow, and he took him in with him when he bought the *Carib*. Bronson began to swindle him right and left, and Scofield, seeing the easy pickings that Bronson was getting, decided he wanted some too; so he forced Bronson to hire him as agent. Between them they pretty near put Larry on the financial rocks even before he and Carney had trouble.

"Bronson wanted to squeeze Scofield out so he would have all the pickings to himself; but he was afraid Scofield would squeal to Larry if he tried it openly, so he slyly told Larry some of the things Scofield was doing, including cheating at cards, and told him to keep it quiet, not to let on where the information came from. Larry fired Scofield, who went to Carney, asked for a job and got it. Scofield had been making five or six hundred dollars a month by his crooked gambling, and it hurt him when Larry forced him to stay away from the clubs.

"He wanted to get back at him; and when the *Scorpion* caught on fire accidentally, he blamed it on Larry and Bronson. That started the trouble between Larry and Carney.

"Besides Bronson and Scofield were continually fighting between themselves. Each had a grudge against the other and was afraid he would squeal, and each wanted to put the other out of the way. Mutual distrust, you see. Then there was an argument about some money that they had stolen from Larry. Each tried to kill the other several times.

"Scofield kept telling Carney that Larry and Bronson were trying to force him out of business, and Bronson was telling Larry that Carney was trying to do the same to him, to cover up his own tracks and find an excuse for the fighting between him and Scofield. That's how it started and what caused it to get worse each day.

"Then last night Scofield was watching the *Carib* through the binoculars, and he saw that Bronson was drunk. He went to the stern, where the anchor watch couldn't see him and signaled a native boatman—you know how there's always a native boat or two hanging under the stern of every ship in the harbor, waiting for a passenger or the chance to steal a few fathom of line. All Scofield had to do was stoop behind the skylight, so the anchor watch could not see him, and beckon the boatman, then drop quietly over the side. That was before the moon came out, you see, and it was quite dark.

"He had the boatman take him to the *Carib*, climbed over the taffrail and hid behind the skylight till Bronson started below, then hit him on the back of the head with the barrel of his revolver and knocked him down the ladder. Then he hesitated; he didn't know whether any one else was aboard or not, though he thought Bronson was alone aft. He waited a few minutes, then started down; and when he saw somebody coming up he let go with the barrel of his revolver again. It was dark, you see, and he thought it was Bronson, come to and on his way up to see who had hit him.

"Scofield jumped down the ladder, found the man he thought was Bronson lying on the floor and started to strangle him with the necktie about his neck; but when Larry turned over and Scofield saw who he had, he let go and ran. He hated Larry, you see, but not enough to murder him.

"He didn't know what to make of things then, and got off the *Carib* into the native boat and back to the *Scorpion* as quick as he could. That's all. We turned Bronson and Scofield over to the gendarmerie and they'll be sent back to New York to be tried for the murder of the bank messenger."

"But tell me how——"

"Oh, yes; I nearly forgot. You see, when Scofield had Larry on the floor of the cabin, he muttered—

" 'A necktie is as good for this as a piece of manila hemp.'

"Now Scofield was the only landsman in Cape Haitien harbor last night, if we exclude the native boatmen—and Larry would instantly have known a native by the accent—and that sentence could come from no one but a landsman. All my men are seamen; Bronson is a seaman—and is accounted for anyway—Carney is a seaman and the McClones are seamen—even if I didn't know better than to suspect them. Also Jem and Michael were playing crib on the wheelbox, and they told me they know that not a man of their crew left the *Gannet*.

"You see, no seaman would ever say 'manila hemp.' A sailor just *couldn't* say it. If he wanted to say something ridiculous he might say 'manila hemp,' but it would require some thought; he wouldn't spit it out naturally and instantly like Scofield, a landsman, did.

"When Larry first told me about it he unconsciously translated it into nautical language because he's a seaman; but when he told me the second time he remembered what the man had really said. A seaman would no more say 'manila hemp' than a horseman would say 'a three-year-old yearling' or than an astronomer or navigator would speak of Jupiter as a 'star.'

"'*Manila hemp!*' There is no such thing as 'manila hemp.' Manila is manila and hemp is hemp. That's the first thing an ordinary seaman learns when he starts to go to sea.

"Manila rope is made of the fiber of a plant related to the banana; hemp rope is made of fiber taken from an herb of the nettle family. Hemp and manila are two entirely different kinds of rope; they look different, feel different and are used for different purposes. If I sent a seaman for manila and he brought me hemp, I'd cut his ears off. And there you are.

"The man who nearly strangled Larry to death was a white man and a landsman; Scofield was the only white landsman in the harbor; no white man came from ashore, or the McClones would have seen him."

Shang Toy rocked back and forth on his mat, then looked up and puckered the skin at the corners of his eys in his peculiar smile.

"Moy!" he called; and when the youth appeared, "Bring paper and pencil."

Moy disappeared, returned in a few seconds with paper and pencil and laid them on the stand.

"You write it, little man," said Shang Toy, handing the pencil to Captain Mac.

The little captain wrote swiftly, finished and read it aloud:

"LARRY WOODS,
Schooner *Carib*,
Cape Hatien.

"Shang Toy wants to invest some more money. He is a good business man. He is willing to back the firm of Woods and Carney. Is it agreed?

McGUIRE."

"He'll jump at that," said Captain Mac. "Larry really likes Carney, and Carney likes him."

Moy was given the message and told to take it to the telegraph office.

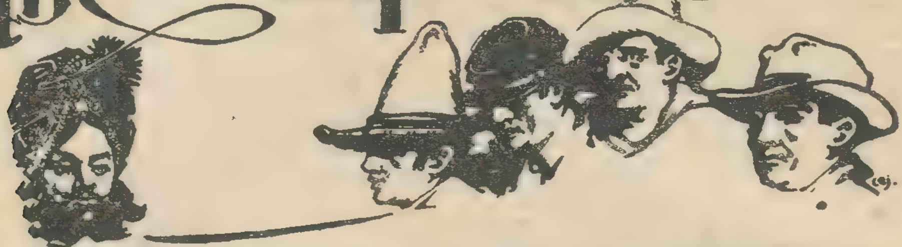
"And now—" Shang Toy picked up his glass of rice whisky— "let us drink to the firm of Carney & Woods."

They drank.

"Now that all the excitement is over," said Captain Mac, stroking his lean, brown cheeks, "we can settle all those world questions that we've been neglecting. We'll just sit here, I in my rocker and you on your mat, quietly, contented, and talk."

"And talk and talk," added Shang Toy, smiling.

The Camp-Fire



A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOME side lights on Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, Captain Jack Crawford and others:

Ware, Massachusetts.

Am not much of an adventurer. Have lived in this town for some twenty-seven years, never going any farther than New York or Boston. But when I was eighteen years of age I took a jump from Boston to Frisco. In 1875 got into the theatrical game there and made several trips around the Coast. Came East in 1879, traveled from that time until 1897 when I quit, learned the optical business, became an optometrist, settled down and have been here ever since. But, believe me, I saw some of the country between 1875 and 1897.

WAS four years with a Russian play by Bartley Campbell, "Siberia." Met a man who was stage manager with Buffalo Bill on his first trip East, in the theater business. This man's name was Charles B. Waite. Told me some things about Cody I never saw in print. Cody was born near Leavenworth, Kansas. When about fifteen his father was killed by a desperado. Swore to be revenged. Killed his man when about twenty-two. Got name through punching buffalo meat to workers constructing Union Pacific Railway.

First exploited in print by Ned Buntlin, Col. E. Z. Judson, whose stories were published in *New York Weekly*. These stories have been reprinted in paper covered book form, but no credit given to author. Buntlin was manager and wrote first play for Cody. He had Wild Bill Hickok, Texas Jack and Donald McKay, the latter an educated Indian and a doctor. Wild Bill was no good to them. Got drunk too much and as an actor was a failure. Texas Jack was even worse. He married an Italian dancer, Mlle. Morlachi, the best of her time. He and Waite organized a company, but he never was sober, so Waite soon closed the show. Saw Cody in Frisco in February, 1878. Had Dr. Carver and Capt. Jack Crawford with him. Shot the scenery full of holes, for lights in those days in the theaters were very poor. Cody was extravagant and when he organized the Wild West in 1883 had no money, but Nate Salisbury started the show.

ON PAGES 178-179 of your April 20th number in "Camp-Fire" is a letter from one Frank J. Parker which speaks of being in Walla, Walla, Washington, sometime ago. I was interested in that myself, for I was in Walla Walla the last of June, 1878, when the Nunatilla Indians under Chief Joseph broke loose and raised —— for some time.

Would it be asking too much to request you to send Mr. Parker's address so I can write him? My object is so I may get some information regarding that country some years previous to 1878 and he as a newspaper man would be apt to know.—ARTHUR B. HOWARD.

THE following from Edward Speyer in reply to a query anent his story in this issue:

Detroit, Michigan.

As for the language of the Indian, these Indians in the Grand Traverse district, some of whom have worked for me, speak just about the same as the farmers and villagers with whom they live. The Indian I had in mind when writing of *Brant* was a land looker and spoke the average English of the woods. Most of the Indians are common laborers. —EDWARD SPEYER.

IN AN interesting letter a comrade questions some of Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur's statements concerning the Vikings:

Detroit, Michigan.

In July 30 issue, A. G. Brodeur, in his article on the Vikings, makes the statement that the Vikings did not wear winged helmets. How come? Even Odin, the all-father, is represented as being a tall, one-eyed man, with a winged helmet. Some of the later Roman writers—e. g. Juvenal—refer to the "blond barbarians, who ravaged the coasts of Britain and of Gaul" as the "winged hats."

EVEN in the modern France of today a winged hat such as women sometimes wear is called a "valkyrie." And not all of the Vikings wore chain-armor; some of them wore the scale armor. I have seen some of it in the Musée de Cluny in Paris.

And while it is true that the Vikings did not begin their raids *in force* until about 700 A. D., it is a fact that they made sporadic raids at a much earlier date than that. Probably as early as the reign of Caesar Augustus, although the habit of the Roman writers of the time, of referring to all alien peoples as simply "barbarians," leaves the matter somewhat in doubt. But there is a ruined tower in Nantes, France, about 100 feet away from the Cathedral of Nantes, that was built shortly after the time of Augustus Caesar as a protection against the raids of the "winged hats." It is there yet; and it has six underground tunnels that radiate like the spokes of a wheel away from the base of the tower. The purpose for which the tower was built is a matter of historical record. (See the History of Nantes.)

In passing I may state that I fell down a flight of steps in one of these underground tunnels and nearly broke my neck.

The history of Bordeaux contains definite references to the raids of the "winged hats" long before 700 A. D.

Some one may say that the "winged hats" were Franks or Visigoths. The Franks were never a maritime people that I ever heard of.

HERE'S something for some one to explain:—"*Who* is the fair god with *hair like the sun*" that is forever recurring in the Aztec, Zapotec and Maya mythology—as Quetzalcoatl or else under the name of Kukulcan? Was he some Norseman? And why do some of the present day Mayas have *gray eyes* and Nordic features? (A fact.) Let's hear some Norsemen's historian explain that. If Lief Ericson discovered America—as he undoubtedly did, why could not some other Norseman have followed the coast on down to the old Maya and Zapotec empires of Guatemala and Yucatan? There is nothing impossible about that. It is a matter of historic record that a replica of the Gogstad ship (found near Christiania) was sailed from Norway *under sail and oar* to the World's Fair in Chicago. After the Vikings once reached North America, what would prevent them from following the coast southward? I could find a crew of Swedes right here in Detroit today (A. D. 1924) who *could* do it.

Well, that's enough of conjecture on history, for a while.—JAMES C. MCKAY.

Here is Mr. Brodeur's reply. Seems to me he proves his case as to the Vikings not wearing "winged hats." As to scale armor and dates of raids, both Mr. McKay and Mr. Brodeur are correct. It must be remembered that when one of our little prose articles handles a big subject it must generalize; there isn't space for noting all exceptions along the way. It may be taken for granted that Mr. Brodeur knew the exceptions when he wrote; he is a recognized authority on things Norse. I do not remember his ever being caught in a slip when handling Norse material in his stories for us.

Berkeley, California.

Mr. McKay cites in proof of the use of winged helmets among the Norse the fact that "Odin, the all-father, is represented as being a tall, one-eyed man, with a winged helmet." True, but by whom is Odin so represented? Only by modern artists. Not a single image or picture of Odin has come down to us from Old Norse times; the oldest we have date from the eighteenth century.

SECONDLY, he states that "some of the later Roman writers — e. g. Juvenal — refer to the 'blond barbarians . . . as the winged hats.'" If Mr. McKay will furnish me with definite references I'll be grateful. I'm trying to give *Adventure* the straight dope, and I think I have it. Any correction definite enough to be checked up will be received with real thanks. But the general assertion that some later Roman writers, or even the statement that Juvenal says somewhere that such or such is the case, doesn't constitute evidence. I've taken the trouble to go all through Juvenal, Tacitus, and Suetonius (some little job) to check up for myself, and can't find a single mention of winged hats. Just to make sure, I asked the help of the leading classical scholars and medieval historians here, and got from them the same statement that I made in *Adventure:* namely, that there isn't anywhere a single contemporary allusion to "winged hats" from the first Roman writers who knew the Nordic peoples down to the eighteenth century. I also called in the assistance of Professor Radin of the University of California, who has a more minute knowledge of classical and post-classical writers than any other man I know, and he carefully went over the whole field to make sure. The result of these investigations is the following:

No Greek or Roman writer ever said, anywhere in recorded writing, that the Scandinavians, or any Nordic people, wore winged helmets. The Gauls (a Celtic people) did wear, not wings, but metal projections on their helmets; and these may have been mistaken for wings. But nothing of the kind has been said by Greek or Roman of the Nordic stocks; and these projections were not wings at all. So much for classical authorities.

NOW for known facts. I have myself seen, partly in reproductions of Norse and early German metal-work, but mainly in the vast collections of the National Museum in Stockholm, all known *contemporary* representations of the Norse helmet. Not one of these is winged, or bears anything remotely like a wing. Some are conical, a few round; some have a ridge or flat metal crest, some—and these appear to be the oldest and commonest type during the true Viking Age—have a raised crest in the form of a couchant boar. This is the type referred to in the "Beowulf." Not one has even the most rudimentary means of attachment for a wing; and a wing would have to be attached by some sort of metal clamp or socket if it were to stay in place. Glue or a band of cloth or twine would not do. And in any case no Norseman would have worn a type of helmet-ornament which the first sword-stroke would have shorn away. To sum up: such actual Norse helmets or representations of them as have come down from Norse time have neither wings nor any means of fastening wings on; and the wing would have been too impracticable to be worn by a fighting man anyhow.

MR. McKAY'S point that a winged hat such as women sometimes wear today is called a "valkyrie" in France means nothing. The idea that Norsemen wore winged helmets seems to have arisen in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century among the German painters of the Romantic School; and once an idea, however false, gets implanted in the modern mind, a milliner may take it up without thereby proving that the idea was right in the first place.

I HAVE found classical references to the Nordic peoples and their helmets, or lack of them—Tacitus says that the Germanic peoples *wore no helmets.* This is probably true; that is to say, in his day the Continental Germans had probably not developed the helmet. The oldest helmets we know among the Norse themselves don't go back to 500 A. D. But the Norse were much more skilled in metal-working than the Continental Germans, even in the bronze age, and may have had helmets even then. If so, they probably wore the round or conical ridged type then, and the boar-crested one from about 500 to about 900; after which they seem to have worn the conical type without ridge or crest, but with nasal. Finally, on this matter of helmets, it is to be noted that no classical writer—not even Tacitus—had, so far as we know, ever seen a Norseman; except that the Danish Cimbri, who invaded Gaul and Italy c. 115 B. C., were smashed by the Roman legions, and so might have been seen by some contemporary author. But the earliest actual accounts of them are by Tacitus and Ptolemy, who had never seen them at all. The Roman, and even the Greek writers, persistently mistook Germans for Celts and *vice versa*, until Tacitus' day.

MR. McKAY is quite right in saying that the Norse made sporadic raids before 700 A. D. In my article, however, I dwelt on the raids after that date because it is only after 700 that the raids assumed that organized character which constitutes the Viking Movement as such. The Viking Age runs between about 700 and 1100. If Mr. McKay had read my earlier filler on the Nordic Peoples, he would have seen that I spoke there of the earlier raids.

It's also true that the Norse used scale-armor as well as ring or chain mail; chain-mail was by far the commoner, however. As a general thing the scale-mail is more typically Celtic, and chain-mail more typically Scandinavian.

I THINK I can give Mr. McKay an answer to his question about Quetzalcoatl, the "fair god," in relation to possible Norse voyages to Mexico. There's no evidence at all that the Norse ever voyaged south of Cape Cod (see Hovgaard's "Voyages of the Northmen," the standard work). Curiously enough, many dark-haired races have myths of fair gods, or fair heroes. This doesn't mean that they had seen Norsemen, but only that for some reason they esteemed fair hair as finer than their own dark hair, perhaps because it was rarer. Or it may be a faint echo of early sun-worship. All sun-worshipping peoples who have recognized a definite sun-god have made him yellow-haired, because of the yellow appearance of the sun-disc. Moreover, there was good reason why the Norse shouldn't have sailed down the Atlantic coast after reaching Vinland. They voyaged to America *via* Iceland and Greenland, taking aboard fresh food and water at both places. They were fine seamen, but the long voyage down from Cape Cod to Mexico without replacing their supplies would have been impossible; and there's no place where they could safely have landed south of Cape Cod without running into Indians. The Indian traditions of the "stone giants" all occur north of Rhode Island, a fairly good indication that the Norse didn't get south of there. If they had, some Norseman would have been sure to come back with the tale, and it would have been recorded in the sagas. The Norse settled many lands, but never without many of them coming back home. Finally, the presence of gray eyes and Nordic features among Mayas means no more than the presence of gray or blue eyes and "Nordic features" among Persians, Berbers, etc. No race not negro has ever been known not to have at least some individuals with eyes, hair and features resembling the Nordic type (I should say, no race not negro or Mongolian). Besides, the Mayas have mixed to some extent with Spaniards, and there are fair, blue-eyed Spaniards.

This is a long answer; but I thought it wise to settle that matter of winged helmets once for all. It's a modern pipe-dream, popularized by the German painters and by Kipling. Besides, I wanted *Adventure* to feel confidence in the stuff I send in. I'm always mighty careful about my dope; and I may claim to know something about the Norse field, having studied it for sixteen years in this country and for one year in Sweden, with the fine Swedish museums and the advice of the greatest Scandinavian scholars at my disposal. I'm no more infallible than the next man; and there's still plenty to earn. But I'll always give the magazine the best I've got and the best I can find.—Arthur G. Brodeur.

A BIT out of a letter from Tom L. Mills of "A. A." concerning one of our buttons:

Feilding, New Zealand.

. . . That same adventurer told me that when he was touring to Wild West (and wet) Coast of New Zealand's South Island (where the coal and gold come from), an old man slapt him on the shoulder, pointed to the *Adventure* button and exclaimed:

"I'm one of them! Come and have a drink with me!"

And they had several, talking the while of "Camp-Fire" and *Adventure* writers.—Tom L. Mills.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue Romaine H. Lowdermilk gives us some interesting data on mule teams and stage-coaches:

In these days of rapid transportation it seems a long cry back to the stage-coaches and freight-teams, yet fifty years reaches back to the heart of it.

There are many men living today who saw the mining-camps of which we read in stories—roaring camps that grew to astonishing size yet whose only link with the railroad was by stage and wagon-train.

SOME of these old camps have been touched by the railroads and have grown into modern cities; some are still producing or being "reworked" and the supplies hauled by motor-trucks. The rest still stand in their desert fastness, ghost towns, deserted, stripped of everything save the old walls and tumbled rafters.

Up until 1910 a mine, to be a real mine, felt a narrow-gauge a necessity. Smaller camps and some whose location made even a narrow-gauge impracticable depended solely upon freight teams. But soon the auto-trucks began to displace the long sweating lines of mules and the past decade has seen the mule teams sadly depleted. The mule-skinner with his privately owned and unbelievably well trained team with bright bells on the leaders is scarce indeed. Only for road building are mules in much demand and even there power-shovels, explosives and tractors do a large portion of the work once handled entirely by the mules.

The old stage coach, floating on leather bands that allowed it to pitch like a canoe in rough seas, went out with the advent of steel springs, and these spring three-seaters have now given way largely to the touring cars. Some idea of the degree of motion of these old Concord stages can be had from the following description given me by an old-time stage driver and Arizona Pioneer who now resides in Prescott, Arizona. He says:

"The body of the coach was rounding and fit snugly on these leather bands which were about 3 inches wide and of 4 to 6 layers of heavy leather. Often the passengers were badly mixed up on rough roads and sore heads from striking the roof were common. When the coach was full (six passengers) they could wedge together and hold to the sides, but when there were only two or three some were often very badly bruised. The stage rocked forward and back, but not so much from side to side.

"The driver and guard climbed into what was called the Boot, in or at the bottom of which lay the Express Box. The boot seat was divided by an iron stanchion and heavy leather belts were buckled across their waists, otherwise they could not stay on. Concord and Thoroughbrace stages were the same; they had thick tires about 2¼ inches wide and wooden hubs, but they were sure some *hubs.* The driver drew about $150 per month and the guard $4 a day and expenses."

HAVING grown up in the West I had become so accustomed to seeing the long teams and stages that they did not represent in my mind anything especially romantic. Rather, they spelled hard work. But about two years ago an artist from New York City pointed out to me that of all the outstanding achievements of the West that required nerve, grit and plain backbone the greatest was the grim battle against odds put up by the long-line skinners who day by day, year after year, set out with a valuable cargo and delivered it across miles of rutted, hilly road, fighting off Indians and outlaws and prying the wagons out of the quicksands and whooping them up the long dry sand washes over and through every kind of obstruction man and nature, storms and heat, could devise.

This artist said that of all the thrilling acts he had witnessed in the West, the one that moved him the most was the sight of twelve hard mules shoving into their collars, their rough-shod hooves digging into the steep mountain road, inching their way up and up, dragging two creaking, jouncing wagons that lurched leadenly along as if protesting at being moved at all. The driver, of course, was everywhere. Some of the time he was off, clamping the rough-locks for a slide down some incredibly steep pitch, and then again he was firing stones or swinging his long lash or was up along the mules, shouting encouragement to the willing ones and cursing the laggards, putting ambition into them with a chain, shovel or club.

A long team toiling through the foothills filled the artist with a desire to paint the scene, depicting the action, the hot sunlight, the immensity of the country, the clouds of yellow dust and the intensity of the endeavor being made by the skinner and his team.

So since this artist pointed out the significance of the freighter and the stage driver I have come to appreciate them more fully, and in my story in this issue I have related an instance of those days when the teamster who took a job had to be a real man—and sometimes was more than that.

THIS isn't "practical." All "practical" people will hoot at it (having found that hooting is more "practical" and effective than thinking and reasoning) and call it by the worst word they know—"idealism." But, if one does really *think* about it, while it certainly is not "practical," it is likely to seem fairly practical after all.

The difference between the words "*practical*" and *practical?* A very great difference. Being "*practical*" means getting all the material profit you can out of everything, as soon as possible for your own personal gain. Being *practical* means getting the best, material or otherwise, out of everything, at the right time and in the right amount, for others as well as yourself, knowing that in the long run you can profit only if others profit. The first is merely selfish savagery and hand to mouth benightedness. The second looks ahead with broad vision and spells real civilization.

No nation that has enough food to go around has any right, or can afford to permit, *any one* to be hungry.

HUNGER is the source of crime. Hungry wolves kill sheep. Hungry men grow bitter against society. The bitterness increases with the hunger and revolts against the theory of charity. Continuous hunger produces a mental condition in the human that it may need *years* to overcome; and it can not be overcome except by feeding him.

It is absurd to say that hungry men should work. They *can't* work. It is ridiculous to call them social parasites because they become tramps and hoboes. They become tramps and hoboes because of a mental condition produced by lack of food and friendship. Food and friendship (nothing else) will cure that condition in them.

Friendship without the food is hypocrisy. Food without the friendship (as in prison) is a temporary stop-gap that may keep the victim alive but does nothing to reduce the underlying cause of social hatred.

I HAVE seen the hoboes in midwinter crawl out from under the freight-cars in Nevada, frozen, full of hate against society and as bitter as rabid animals. Midnight; no money; a row of bright restaurant windows in view. The prospect—arrest at daybreak, no breakfast, and a "floating order" from the magistrate.

Some of us tried an experiment. We handed out a dollar to each frozen hobo who passed. We said nothing. The hoboes said nothing. They lit out for the ham-and-egg shops over the way. But the change in the hobo's frame of mind, as he discovered there was some one who thought enough about him to stand there at midnight and give him a dollar without any strings to it, was magical. You could feel it, see it, understand it. A potential murderer turned into a man with a human appetite.

The money spent in "charity" (largely spent on salaries, "investigations" and "uplift" by thoroughly well meaning people) in the U. S. A. every year would feed every hungry individual in the country several times over every day of the year.

It would be *much cheaper* to feed men than to police them.

MEN, women and children, who *knew* they could get good plain food, and where to get it, whether they had "earned" or "deserved" it or not, would undoubtedly for a while, in very many instances, take the utmost advantage of it and eat without looking for work. For a while at least, a very great number would refuse work, were it offered to them. But the food—good food, be it understood, without any strings to it, and no questions asked—would produce its inevitable effect on each individual. Maybe without knowing how or why, they would change into different beings. The carking hate, that comes of starving in sight of affluence (whose ever fault it is) would disappear. They would "feel their oats." The craving for independence, that is part of the secret of the tramp's condition, would assert itself along new lines.

And *in any event* the country would save money by removing much of the cause of crime.

The point is: a nation that has enough food for every one should be ashamed to let any one be hungry.—TALBOT MUNDY.

SOMETHING from W. C. Tuttle in connection with his complete novelette in this issue:

Hollywood, California.

"*Swan River*" *Smith* is a real character, although his name was not Swan River. He was a Montana sheriff, who had such a sense of humor and sense of square-dealing that his jail rarely had an occupant. He would rather play a joke than catch a criminal. One day three young men arrived from the effete East. They were of the opinion that this was Rome; so they must imitate the Romans. Their first act was to secure guns, belts and holsters, which they proceeded to drape around their waists. They invaded a hotel dining-room and were met by the sheriff, who looked 'em over carefully, shook his head seriously and informed them that they would have to leave their guns out in the hall. It was a rule of the hotel, he told them. So they hung their belts with their hats, apologized for the oversight, and went to eat.

THE sheriff extracted their cartridges, went to the blacksmith shop and proceeded to remove all the powder. Then he went back, reloaded the guns and waited. The boys came back, got their guns and came into the bar-room, where they were met by the sheriff. He led the conversation to pistol shooting, and found that these boys were just a little in favor of their own marksmanship. A drink or two increased their ability.

The upshot of the matter was that the sheriff bet them each twenty dollars that they couldn't hit the door of the livery-stable at a distance of fifty feet. The door was wide enough to cover an aperture fifteen feet square. They put up their money and all went to the stable. The sheriff made it plain in the bet that they were to shoot just once—or as he put it, one attempt.

They looked at the door and wanted to enlarge the bet; but the sheriff declined. The result of the shooting was ridiculous. There was nothing left to explode, except the primers. The bullets stuck in the barrels of two guns, and the third barely hopped out of the muzzle.

The sheriff collected the money, while the three boys went back where they purchased the guns and tried to get their money back. They thought that the guns were to blame, I reckon.

"FORTY *Dollar*" is also a real character, but of another name. The incident of *Hank Bell* nesting in on a big ranch was taken from a case of that kind in Montana. Except in the real case, the nester was a Scot and the cattleman was one of Montana's famous millionaires. Their feud is history. The old Scot won out, but he had a —— of a lot of misery.

Also the incident of a boy stealing from his father, because the old man was so stingy, actually happened. And he did vent the brand, etc.—and got away with it. The rest of the tale is merely fiction, with here and there a bit of real happenings. —TUT.

WHICH is the better way to break a horse? Speaking generally, I believe that kindness gets better results from animals than roughness.

Chico, Calif.

Regarding inquiry as to merits of the two methods of breaking horses.

THE "bronco busting" method of making a horse ridable often leaves him heart-broken, a spiritless creature that moves only to have the rider lay off the quirt and steel. The other product of this method is the one that isn't broken, but learns that all men don't ride equally well and each time he is saddled he takes the rider's caliber. Good horses have been produced after having been ridden by bronco busters (some after the twisters gave them up as bad medicine), but I am sure that these good horses were the result of winning their confidence, not of riding them till jumpless.

The gentler method really isn't "breaking," it is training; the horse is gotten used to the rigging, finds that the trainer isn't to be feared, rarely learns to buck, is more willing, and lasts longer.

In favor of the bronco-busting method, one can say it makes a horse ridable in less time. Against it, that the product is less useful and shorter lived.—BILL GIANELLA.

THE following is from a life-long practical politician with real accomplishment back of him—a personal letter to me, not intended for publication, his name, therefore, not being printed. You will note, I think, not only hard sense in what he says but an earnest and sincere interest in the welfare of our country. I wish there were more politicians like him.

Naturally it pleases me to have his endorsement of the principle I've been fighting for through some fifteen years—that the one hope of this country is systematic education of citizens in civic understanding and civic morality. Such as I can be brushed aside as dreamers and idealists by "practical" people. They will have some difficulty in brushing aside as a dreamer and idealist this man who is a successful, practical politician and who can probably beat most of them back, sides and across at their own "practical" game. To "practical" knowledge, experience and skill he happens to add the ability to think and a desire for his country's good. But, perhaps, in the eyes of these "practical" gentry, no one can be "practical" who thinks of anything whatever except his own personal profit. In the last analysis, that seems to be their real test of what is "practical." The only trouble is that they haven't sufficient understanding to think straight even for their own profit. By following their half-baked reasoning they gain— What do they gain? And they lose— What do they lose? As to the latter, they don't know. If they did, they would scrap their theory of life.

January 8, 1923.

The real and absolute fundamental that everybody knows who has "grown up" is so non-technical and simple in form that almost everybody never thinks of it. School-teachers, "educators," writers, speakers, judges, politicians know that *A Constitution Is a Natural Thing*. Forgetting or overlooking this simple fact, they make much work of taking governmental constitutions, which are frames for government, and revamping them into various forms in no manner natural. A true constitution written or unwritten never made a right. It simply declared a right. It was a natural thing.

A true statute is a law based upon a constitution (a frame for government), regulating life upon or under that constitution.

Our present system makes of constitutions statutes, and of statutes declaratory "don'ts" more or less disregardful of right and quite thoroughly entrenching great bureaus or commissions manufactured to enforce the "don't." So we have our agents, inspectors and whatnot.

All this pretty much because our teachers, preachers and office-holders forget the natural thing, the foundation, and become thoroughly artificial in both talk and act.

PEOPLE originally came to this country for one reason and another to live under their own ideas so far as possible. Many mistakes were made, since they were all human. But finally, getting together, the natural thing to do, they drew up a constitution. It was not perfect, but pretty thoroughly declaratory of recognized natural rights just the same. More than a hundred years of monkeying with it has improved it a little perhaps, and injured it considerable. It has not been injured so much, however, as the State constitutions which are more easily tampered with as a general rule.

These groups, blocks, cliques, gangs and organizations, who want something special for special selfish purposes and who want that specialty put into a constitution instead of a statute, are dangerous. A wrong statute can be changed. So can a wrong insert in a constitution be changed. But the wrong insert is in a place where it is hard, very hard, to change. It has become a part of the frame and by the time it is proven wrong we find statutes built on and around it in pretty solid construction form. While an improper statute can be taken off and discarded, once it gets into the constitution all overlapping and other layers of laws must be loosened before the frame can even be approached.

NOW if people in authority—teachers, preachers, judges and lawmakers with all their force—would recognize the fundamental there would be not so much of this. The teachers would teach, the preachers would preach, the judges would judge and the lawmakers would prove an experiment before putting it where it could do the most possible harm in the least possible time and in the most inaccessible position.

A detail is a detail wherever encountered. But if a detail is made a part and parcel of the main plan and in such form that it can not be again placed with the details where it belongs, to be discarded if unsound, then it is not only a detail but also a nuisance and may quite possibly wreck the main plan.

If older people would recognize the fundamental instead of trying to find it in complexities and technicalities, and the younger were taught the fundamental, the majority could then figure out the difference between noise and sound sense when the two should be produced. As it is, the noise is becoming more and more considered as sound sense in governmental affairs. And since all of our affairs are governmental affairs from the so called "little red school house" up, it means, does it not, that we are being pretty well smothered in noise, if that expression may be permitted?

POLITICS is a rotten game. But politics is the science of government just the same. Politics is rotten because it is so made. That is another fundamental most people know but forget. If they did not forget they would know that the "respectable" business man—banker, farmer, laborer, preacher or teacher—who is honorable in all business dealings is crooked as —— just the same if his political promise is no good. They would know that such people are more crooked and dangerous than yegg, safe-blower, forger or any other criminal, because a no good political promise is the ruination of a country if sufficiently multiplied. But most people laugh when a political promise is broken. Why take it as a joke? If eight of ten bank directors were crooked and the stockholders knew it, would they laugh? If a labor leader "goes South" with the Union funds, does the Union laugh? If five hundred Congressmen lie, promise themselves into being directors of the biggest business on earth, the business of the American people, the people laugh. Why do they laugh? Simply because they forget a fundamental or have not yet been taught that fundamental. So they are serious about small or comparatively small crooked matters, but not about the big one.

A LITTLE awakening for the elders and teaching for the youngers might work considerable change in the system. Politics is rotten because the people allow it to be so, that is all. Government becomes more and more involved in bungling and extravagance for the same reason and no other. Loan a dead-beat a dollar and of course he will not pay it back. Give the dead-beat a legislative office and he will blow you many dollars. Your taxes will show that plainly. Why not? What the —— else can be expected? Those who laugh at political crooked matters are to be pitied either for their lack of knowledge or their lack of ability to use knowledge.

Some one, sometime, somewhere in this country may realize and be able to put the realization in force that the older generations must be awakened and the younger generation must be taught what America is, was and should be. That may be done only by education from the beginning of course. How to do it is a problem.—X. Z.

PART of a later letter from the same man:

I have written you about fundamentals also calling it ground work.

The first is, of course, that *a constitution is a natural thing*. Every animal, bird, fish or reptile, and in fact every living thing in nature has a "constitution." So with human beings. It is a part of the natural scheme of things. It is the fundamental, the ground work, the foundation. One man gets pretty badly hurt. He survives because of his strong constitution, as we put it. A weaker man dies of a lesser injury. His constitution could not pull him through, as we put it. You will get my meaning I am sure. Now with a government we have something of men, by men, for men, (meaning all mankind of course in that particular governmental sphere). Every act—we may, I think, say every thought, also—of every person within the territorial jurisdiction of that government is affected by that government. The person is a part of it. It is a part of the person. Nobody can get away from it.

IF THE governmental constitution is strong, healthy, humanly normal, natural, the government is good *if, when and as long as* the people understand it.

When the people forget or do not know, then they do not understand.

Then they allow quackery to step in and drug or bleed or smother this natural thing until it is weakened or destroyed. Being man-made, it can not escape. The science of government is politics. So, just as a good doctor can help a weak heart or an over-burdened heart over a bad place with the use of strychnin, so can a bad or inexperienced doctor kill with the same medicine. So, just as a good politician (and the word is used advisedly and properly) can help good constitutional government by passing sound laws to enforce and properly regulate natural and constitutional personal rights and actions, so can a bad or inexperienced or ignorant politician destroy by passing unsound laws. An individual must know enough to get a good doctor. So must he and his fellows know enough to get a good representative, for of such is good government made and no other. And while we, as individuals, with our natural constitutions which were born with us, may not need a doctor until we get sick, a governmental constitution, being made for the taking care of our outside interests, but natural if right, must have its doctor whether it is sick or well. I think you will understand what I mean. Somebody must do the work and see that it is done whether right or wrong.—X. Z.

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A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

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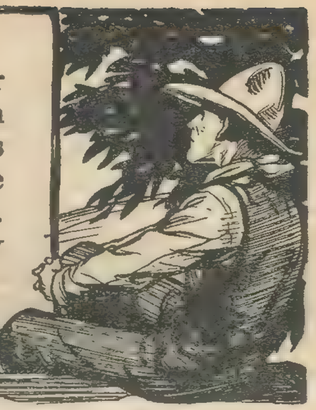

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CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

7. ★ South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, South Pacific Ocean. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

8. ★ Australia and Tasmania
PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Rd., Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting,

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★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*

sports, history. *(Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*

9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
Fay-Cooper Cole, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

10. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. Armit, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. *(Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*

11. Philippine Islands.
Buck Connor, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

12. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

13. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
Captain C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure.* Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

17. ★ Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
George W. Twomey, M. D., 41 Rue de France, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting. *(Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*

18. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
Robert Simpson, care *Adventure.* Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

19. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, La Roseraie, Cap d'Ail (Alpes Maritimes), France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. *(Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*

20. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

21. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ont., Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

22. Africa Part 5 Morocco
George E. Holt, care *Adventure.* Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

23. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

24. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

25. ✠ Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. Moffat, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

26. Turkey
J. F. Edwards, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

27. Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.)

28. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

29. Albania
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

30. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
Lieut. William Jenna, Plattsburg Barracks, New York. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

31. Scandinavia
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

32. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
Fred. F. Fleischer, care *Adventure.* History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

33. ✠ Great Britain
Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

34. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
Edgar Young, care *Adventure.* Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

35. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

36. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

37. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

38. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

39. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, care of Roadmaster, S. P. Co., San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

40. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

41. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

42. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
A. D. L. Robinson, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

43. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

44. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
(Editor to be appointed.) Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

45. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

46. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

47. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Larkspur, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

48. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

49. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

50. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. ROBINSON, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

51. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

52. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

53. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

54. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

56. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

57. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

58. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

59. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
HOWARD A. SHANNON, care *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
HOWARD A. SHANNON, care *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

63. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

64. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

FRED. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, Military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, 217 W. 125th St., New York. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

K.—First Aid on the Trail

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazards of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

L.—Health-Building Outdoors

CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

M.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. NEWMAN, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

N.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure.*

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men,** Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

How Chinese Doctors Are Paid

AN AMIABLE passage of words between a couple of "Ask Adventure" men:

Tientsin, China.

On page 188 of *Adventure* for February 20th, 1924, I find an article entitled "How the Chinese Pay the Doctor."

Being a physician, and having lived in and practised medicine in China for several years, I feel competent to point out a few inaccuracies in this article.

So far as I know there is not a hospital in China that is equipped and operated by any Government except the Chinese unless it is a military or naval hospital. Several hospitals are operated by the municipal councils of the different concessions in the treaty ports; but these are more on the order of city hospitals than Government hospitals.

Nearly every city has one or two hospitals operated by the Catholic Church. In Tientsin there is a French and an Italian Catholic Hospital, and in Peking there is a similar French institution.

Mr. Halton writes that he imagines that there should be quite a demand for trained nurses in the treaty ports. This is a grave error. Whenever we physicians have a patient ill enough to require the services of a trained nurse we insist on the patient being sent to a hospital. This makes it difficult for a foreign trained nurse. An additional difficulty is the Chinese trained nurse. Many of the mission hospitals have graduated many well trained nurses who are *good* and who work for four dollars, Mex., a day; equal to two dollars in real money.

Mr. Halton classifies Hongkong as a treaty port. For the love of Mike, write him a letter and tell him that Hongkong is not a treaty port and that Hongkong has never been a treaty port. Hongkong is a British colony as much as is Canada or Jamaica.

I have lived in China, as I have said, for several years, and I have a wide acquaintance among all classes of Chinese; but I have never yet been able to find any Chinese who paid his doctor by the year to keep him well. When a Chinese becomes ill he consults a Chinese doctor who tells him to go to the medicine shop and to buy certain things and to prepare and take them in a certain manner. For this the doctor receives a fee from the patient. I think that Mr. Halton got this yearly-stipend idea from the fact that it is a custom among both foreigners and Chinese to make an annual contract with a doctor. The doctor receives a stated amount each year, and for that fee he takes care of all the ailments of the patient.

Coming back to the object, the letter from the inquirer, of Miss Hewett. There is no possible chance for her to get a position in a Hongkong hospital unless she is British. The Shanghai General Hospital is also under British management, and the same rule applies.

If Miss Hewett really wishes to come to China she should write to the Rockefeller Foundation in New York City. They are continually sending nurses to the Peking Union Medical College, and she might get a position with them. The pay is small; she would probably receive ninety dollars to one hundred dollars gold a month. The best advice I could give Miss Hewett would be to stay in Los Angeles.

Please excuse this letter. For ten days I have been carrying my right arm in a sling on account of a carbuncle on my right wrist, and I have picked this out with a couple of fingers of my left hand.—G. W. TWOMEY.

A copy of Dr. Twomey's letter was sent on to Mr. Fred. J. Halton, whose accuracy had been called into question. Mr. Halton wrote Dr. Twomey as follows:

Chicago, Ill.

I had in mind my own experience in Hongkong, where I resided for several years. The doctors there continually spoke of the difficulty in getting trained nurses; and when I say "trained" I mean as we understand it in this country or in Europe—nurses thoroughly proficient. I know that in obstetrical cases this was particularly the condition;

and the two or three nurses in Hongkong who were not officially attached to the hospital staff were kept very busy. For that reason I assumed that there was a real call for foreign trained nurses.

I note that you criticize me for classing Hongkong as a treaty port. I know of course that it is a British colony; but in speaking generally of the ports of China it is usual to class those having a considerable European population as "treaty ports." As a matter of fact, under the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, you will find the following treaty ports officially listed for the Province of Kwangtung: Canton, Swatow, Kongmoon, Kowloon,* Lappa, Pakhoi, Samshui, Hongkong (ceded to Great Britain) Macao (ceded to Portugal) and Kwangchow (leased to France).

Regarding the statement that Chinese pay their doctors for keeping them well and that their pay ceases when the patient becomes ill: While that practise may not have come within your experience, being a "foreign doctor," I believe that such was the case on the authority of J. Dyer Ball and J. O. P. Bland as well of many other noted writers. On page 353, "The Chinese," written by J. Stuart Thomson, who was for some years chief clerk of the Pacific Mail S. S. Co. at Hongkong, you will find this statement:

"No physician is paid in full if his patient succumbs."

However, as my advice was to a white trained nurse who intended to practise among foreigners this has not much bearing on the case and might be classed with W. S. Gilbert's "corroborative detail calculated to lend artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative."

I note that you state that there is no possible chance for Miss Hewett to obtain a position in a Hongkong hospital unless she is British. My information is that she is eligible if she obtains a British certificate—which can be secured in Hongkong by taking a post-graduate course there. The same applies to a doctor. As probably you know, an American degree of M. D. is not recognized there unless the applicant takes a post-graduate course at a British university; but before the war degrees granted by German universities were recognized.

I thank you very much for your letter and the interest shown in *Adventure* and always welcome criticism.

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*You will note that they do not even show Kowloon as leased to Great Britain.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Muskrat-Farming

MONEY in it for the right man in the right place:

Request:—"Can you give me any information on the practibility of muskrat-farming? Does it pay? What is necessary to keep them enclosed or prevent them from leaving pond? Is it necessary to feed them in winter season? Can you give me addresses of any in your territory?"—W. B. HUNTER, Danforth, Me.

Reply, by Mr. Shannon:—In reference to muskrat-farming I can say that there is a successfully operated farm on the Eastern Shore of Maryland just out of Cambridge, Md. This is conducted by a Mr. Gibbs of Chester, Pa., who manufactures muskrat traps. He leased several hundred acres in the swamp-lands of Maryland to use in experimenting with his traps and found the proposition so profitable that he extended the lease to cover several thousands of acres, and it is reported that he made fabulous sums from the venture during the peak-price period.

There have been several attempts made in that section to commercialize the muskrat possibilities, and the business appears to have a sound basis. The swamps are fenced with small net wire screen set well down in the muddy bottom land, but the rats go through it when they feel inclined. Mr. Gibbs, it is stated, based his success on an abundance of fresh water and a systematic extermination of vermin that prey on the young "kits." No feeding is necessary, I'm told.

You might write Mr. W. M. Hoyt, Taylors Island, Md., a former New Yorker who has made a close study of the possibilities of muskrat-farming. He told me personally that with the right kind of management it could be made to pay big dividends.

Firearms of the Middle Ages

WHEN the Chinese beat us to it:

Request:—"I shall be much obliged if you will answer the following questions listed below. Enclosed please find an addressed envelop.

1. When and where was the first cannon fired?

2. I had a flintlock gun, made by Ketland & Co., London. It was dated 1800. It was shipped to me as a British musket, but there are several things about it making me believe it is a fowling-piece. The barrel is 44 inches and not very heavy. It is approximately a three-quarter inch bore. There is a rude, low front sight but no rear sight; nor is there any sign of a place intended for a rear sight. These are indications that lead me to believe it was a fowling-piece although it has otherwise the general outlines of an Army musket. Could you determine whether it is a fowling-piece or a smooth-bore musket intended for a large, round musket-ball?

3. How did they load their guns in the British Army in 1800—by using charges wrapped in paper and biting off the end? Or did they pour the powder into measurer loose and then into the barrel from a powder-horn like the hunting-guns?

4. Was the matchlock the first gun invented; and if so, when? How was the matchlock loaded and fired?

5. There was another kind of those old guns fired by carrying a lighted rope around with you. What kind of gunlocks would you call them?

6. How long did it take to load and fire one of those old matchlock guns, fired with a rest? I should judge by the pictures of them that they were very uncomfortable. Did a soldier suffer much from shooting them in a battle?

7. How long did it take to load and fire a flintlock gun of 1800?

8. How long did it take to load and fire a wheel-lock?"—L. A. NORRIS, Westwood, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Barker:—1. The use of cannon and gunpowder was known by the Chinese for several centuries before it was known in Europe. The Great Wall of China, built about 200 B. C., had embrasures for cannon. The commencement of the 14th century saw cannon first used in Europe. The first mention of cannon in Europe was at Amberg in Germany in 1301. In 1313 the town of Ghent had stone-throwing guns.

Edward III brought these new weapons over from Flanders for use against the Scots in 1327. In 1325 the Republic of Florence made iron bullets and metal cannon. In 1328 the Teutonic nations throughout northern Europe made use of large cannon in their wars in Prussia and Lithuania. At the sieges of Puy-Guillern and of Cambrai by Edward III cannon were used (1339), and there exist representations of cannon used by the English at the battle of Crécy in 1346. This latter is the date that most general writers give, but I have stated for you earlier usage of them.

2. The Ketlands were makers of fowling-pieces and all kinds of pistols in London and Birmingham from 1770 on. They made no muskets. Your piece is undoubtedly a fowling-piece. Ketland shipped more arms to the American colonies than any other maker.

3. They loaded their guns in both ways that you mention at that time. The cartridge—that is to say, the complete charge of the firearm wrapped in one packet—appears to have been used for the first time in Spain about 1569; it was not adopted in France until 1644, along with the cartridge box invented by Gustavus Adolphus in 1630.

4. The first hand gun was a hand cannon, first used at Perugia in 1364, at Padua in 1386, and in Switzerland in 1392. This was merely an iron tube affixed to a shapeless stock. There was a touch-hole on top on which the powder was poured and any fire handy used to touch it off.

The first improvement was to place a small pan for the powder on the side, with the touch-hole on the side, the barrel thus acting as a wind-break. At about 1424 came the matchlock. The match, which was a small piece of rope so treated as to keep its end a live coal, was held in the jaws of a serpentin or dragon, without trigger or tumbler, a sort of small linstock. The pan was on the side. Also the touch-hole. It was loaded at the muzzle; then the lighted end of the match was brought down to the pan, igniting the powder, which went through the touch-hole, set off the powder in the barrel, and bang went the bullet. This was improved by degrees with trigger, spring and tumbler.

5. Answer in last.

6. Providing your match was lighted, it took no longer than to fire a flintlock or wheel-lock. The rest of the process was the same. They were a clumsy gun used with a rest. No, I doubt if the soldier suffered from shooting them.

7 and 8. You can estimate the time. In case of match, wheel, or flint, as they were all usually muzzle-loaders—there were some flint breech-loaders—the powder, ball and wadding had to be rammed home and the priming put in the pan. The time taken to wind up a wheel-lock was negligible. I have fired them all, and could fire one as quickly as the other, allowing, in case of the match-lock, that the match was lighted. Remember that the wheel-lock was ignited by a flint. The difference was that the flint was stationary and the wheel spun round and grated against it, instead of the flint falling on the steel as in the flintlock proper.

Good-by, Open Range

A "DOGY", by the way, is defined by the Standard Dictionary as "a motherless range calf:"

Request:—"Will you kindly give me some information about Colorado and Wyoming or States that border these? I have always wanted to go West, but I have never had the chance, so I am writing you for information.

Is there an open range in either State a few miles from a medium-sized town? How were ranches run in the early Western days? How now? Any other interesting information will be gladly received."—VYVYAN BLANKENSHIP, Crossville, Tenn.

Reply, by Mr. Middleton:—There are miles on miles of open range in Wyoming; however, this land is for the greater part worthless except for the grazing of sheep. Colorado also has open range left, the greater part and the best of it being in the northwestern section in Moffat County.

There is homestead land in Wyoming open to entry, but as I have said, it is for the greater part worthless. If you are interested in Wyoming as a future place of residence, I'd advise you to address a letter to Commissioner of Agriculture, State Capitol Building, Cheyenne, Wyo., asking him for information and literature on the Green River Valley. It will be sent free. Land there can be bought for a small per cent. down payment, the balance covering a period of several years. I've understood the land there is suitable for raising of small grains, hay, etc.

Northwestern Colorado offers the best opportunity to my notion. There is still land over there open to entry, and the soil is there also. It is sage-brush land, easily cleared. Wheat, oats, barley, rye, etc., and alfalfa, timothy and native hay. In some parts berries are raised. Winters are sometimes inclined to be long, but no worse than winters in the middle-western States; one can buy a relinquishment there for as low as $320 for 320 acres. A section, or 640 acres, can be bought at from $400 up, price depending upon nature of land, distance from rail, improvements on place, etc. Write to Finley & Herrich, Craig, Colo., for literature if interested.

In the early days ranching was confined almost entirely to raising cattle. A man would file on a section of land, usually in a well sheltered place where there was water, timber, etc., build his cabin, corrals, etc., and call it the home ranch. He'd range his cattle on the open range near, and as a rule this was regarded as his territory.

Nowadays, the open range that is worth anything is rapidly disappearing; wire fences have made their appearance, and little homes of from 160 acres to 640 acres cover what was once the open range. Then too the thoroughbred has to a great extent replaced the "dogy" of the open range some years ago. Ranchmen raise the feed to winter their stock; hay is raised under irrigation, and the "puncher" of just a few years ago is usually a competent hay hand and understands irrigation, and his work with the rope is confined to roping calves at branding time, and to the dragging of an occasional "critter" from a mud hole. Verily, times have changed.

Craig, Colo., is the county seat of Moffat County; and the open range is located all of the way from two miles to two hundred miles, north, west and south of it. Craig has a population of some 1,500, and is the end of rail on the Denver & Salt Lake Railroad.

Believe this about fixes you out; if there is more I shall be glad to accommodate at any time. Am enclosing two leaflets which may prove interesting.

A Job in Portuguese East

THE chances are best for the Portuguese:

Request:—"I would like to get information about some companies that are making a trip to Africa or Portuguese East and that pays all expenses with transportation.

Willing to take all chances among inhabitants."—Frank A. Wagner, Detroit, Mich.

Reply, by Mr. Waring:—Well, now, friend, you have sure got me up a tree, for I do not know of any philanthropist who will be willing to engage you on the terms you speak of. The trading companies engage men in Europe occasionally for certain positions, but every man going to tropical Africa "takes all the chances," so that you are no further ahead than they are.

I might say that provided you had the necessary qualifications, with your name on the waiting list, together with an ability to speak Portuguese, you might after a few years be able to get out there. Then again the trading companies—and there are not more than two or three of any importance—have on their boards of directors a preponderance of Portuguese with headquarters in Lisbon, consequently a native gets the preference when a vacancy occurs.

I am sorry that I can not hold out brighter prospects for you, but Portuguese East Africa is an impossible place for most of us.

Trout-Fishing in Georgia

BAITS, lures and tackle:

Request:—"Can you advise me where I can get a book that deals comprehensively with the subject of trout-fishing, bait, both live and artificial; tackle and method of using; in fact I want all the information possible on the subject?

In order that you may better understand what I require, will say that my fishing is done in Georgia, and heretofore has been confined principally to trot-line fishing, by which I mean a heavy line running from shore to shore of a small river, with hooks about two feet apart, the baiting and fishing of the line being done from a boat. By this means we are generally assured of having enough fish to supply the camp, the fish being for the most part of the "cat" family, with an occasional trout. For bait we use worms, crawfish and minnows, both on the trot line and in fishing from the shore with the bamboo-pole outfit of our boyhood days. No artificial bait, no rod and reel.

This year, however, I am venturing into a new field in more ways than one. I have first-hand information that there is in the northwestern section of the State (Georgia) a little river that is teeming with trout of various kinds, and that they are readily taken with flies, etc. Now the rod and reel, flies, etc., being entirely new to me, I am desirous of acquiring all the information upon the subject that is possible. At any rate all that is possible to get into one book.

I think I am safe in saying that I have done more fishing, caught less fish and had more genuine pleasure doing it than any other fellow in the country, and have always wanted to try my hand with the fly outfit on trout. From all accounts of this river, it is a fisherman's paradise.

Enclosed please find addressed envelop and postage."—W. L. Funderburk, Detroit, Mich.

Reply, by Mr. Thompson:—As I live in Chattanooga, Tenn., I am very familiar with your fishing in Georgia, and I am wondering if you are not confusing bass as many Georgians do with trout. You have bass in most of your streams, and on account of your description of your methods of fishing I feel sure it is bass instead of trout you want to know most about.

But you have trout in your Georgia mountains, as I have recently come from a fishing trip there. In the north part of Habersham County in the Soque and Wildcat you find nice rainbow trout; and in the upper part of Wildcat, which flows into Burton Lake, there are lots of brook trout, but they run very small. I found a very light fly rod and small trout flies on No. 10 very useful, especially Peck's Midgets and ginger quill and Cahill flies. There are also trout back from Alaculsa Valley in the Alaculsa and in Rock Creek, which runs into Jack River up in Beech Bottom.

Sure would like to know the river in northwest Georgia which has so many trout, and you could bet I would go with you any time you wanted; but I feel sure in the mountains at that end it must be small and large mouth bass you have in mind. Is it Little River that you are thinking about?

If they are trout be sure to carry all standard patterns with you, and a good supply of coachman, black gnat and brown hackle, also the trout midgets in different patterns. You will need a fly rod not necessarily over nine feet, with a good hard action, first-class fly line, leaders six feet long, creel and waders if you mind wading without them. There are two little wooden lures used in fly fishing which are real killers; they are the redhead and white body, also scale finish Fly-Oreno, made by South Bend Bait Co., which I have used with success in Georgia waters.

You can get the book "Streamcraft" by Holden, from *Field and Stream*, New York. As you are in Detroit stop in Lou Eppinger's sporting-goods store, 310 Congress Street, and tell him I asked him to fit you up for trout and show him this letter and he will know what to provide you and at less expense than down here. I sure would like to go to that river. But while I know of bass streams in northwestern Georgia, do not know of trout streams.

If I can be of further service please let me know.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Trick Lariat-Spinning

A CRINGLE, mentioned by Mr. Connor below, is an eye or loop in a rope, sail, etc.:

Request:—"I would like to find out what kind of rope is the best for lariat trick roping. Which way is the best to keep it stiff or to take care of a new rope?

Would you kindly tell me where I can purchase some of this rope? I have tried many places in New York City but they told me the same thing; they only use it out West, so they don't sell it here."—H. A. SCHNELL.

Reply, by Mr. Connor:—As I am about the only "A. A." editor who has been a rope spinner, I will say:

1. Secure a Sampson spot sash cord, manufactured by the Sampson Cordage concern, I believe in Boston, Mass. This address you can get from 'most any hardware concern. The enclosed sample of the size is just the right thing—use no other!

2. For a hondo, or loop through which the standing part of the rope passes to make the circle which you spin, take some heavy outside insulated wire and peel it down. Then take and drive a nail through the cord about one foot from the end and push the wire through the hole. Start and wrap very tightly with three-eighths of an inch space between the wraps until you have made enough turns to form the hondo. This will be about two and one-half inches of wrapped wire.

Now bend it together and form an eye, something similar to a cringle, not over three inches long. If you are patient, get yourself a fid—a small marlinspike—and prick up the strand and splice the unraveled ends through and wrap with about five turns of smaller-sized wire to hold the eye firm. Now take your other end and run it through to form the size loop you desire. Do not wet or even oil the rope; it is never satisfactory when treated thus.

3. I take it from your letter that you have never had any experience in rope-spinning. If not, a good way to start is to grasp the end of the rope at about fourteen inches from the eye. Now take the standing or long end and lay it in your hand with the index finger separating it from the part of the rope that contains the eye. Bend slightly forward, and start the rope with a left-handed turn. It will require much patience and hours upon hours of practise before you will get a true circling spin of the rope.

The other numerous tricks come only of studying. To give that information I could go on for days, and then you would be so muddled as to the procedure that you would throw up your hands in despair.

There are many very graceful and difficult gyrations to be formed with a spinning rope. The first ones will be to judge the circling rope right, and then step into it. The next will be juggling it up and down while circling your body. Then come the butterfly and the ocean wave and all kinds of loops under the legs, over the shoulders, and spinning changes from either hand. It is a long, tedious grind to become an expert at rope-spinning.

4. The enclosed piece of rope has the spots faded from it, but the new material has spots woven throughout the entire rope. Do not handle over a twelve-foot length to start with—increase as you become familiar with the task to any length you feel able to handle.

This information is as clear as it is possible to make it, and I sincerely hope I have aided you in your search for the right material.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Natives of Bering Straits

YOU shock 'em if you cuss:

Request:—"Would like information on that part of Alaska jutting into Bering Strait; its distance from Asia at that point, and the climatic conditions.

Is it a fact that the strait is sometimes frozen over from Alaska to Asia? If so, will it support a great weight?

How do the people in that section make a living, and what language is spoken?

What route could be taken from Bellingham, Wash., to Cape Prince of Wales?

I am enclosing self-addressed envelop and stamp for reply."—VERNON LAQUE, New Orleans, La.

Reply, by Mr. Solomons:—East Cape and Cape Prince of Wales, the nearest points of the two hemispheres, are about eighty miles apart, if I remember correctly, but any good map or atlas will show you exactly if you take the trouble to measure it. The climate there is sunny and warm daytimes in spring and summer and fall, cooler of course mornings and afternoons; and it freezes at night sometimes. Winter is moderately cold—less so than northern Canada, because never on the coast does the air become as cold as inland—and there is a foot to two feet of snow that lies all winter. Blizzards are numerous in the winter months. The spring weather before the snow melts in April is delightful; freezing at night, however.

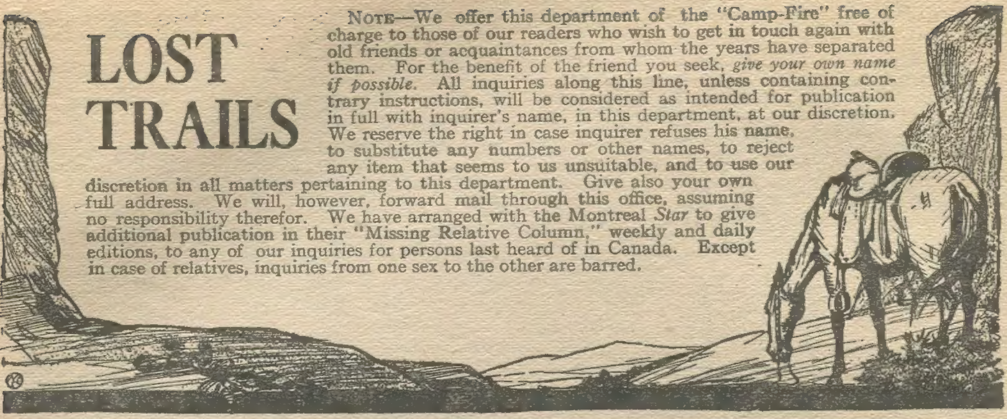
The natives have a tradition that the Straits froze over once and permitted people to cross on the ice. It is not probable; yet it *is* possible that the drifting floe ice accumulated and jammed in spite of the strong current that flows through. If it ever froze over or jammed rather, of course it would support nearly any weight, for the floes that flow with the currents in Bering Sea and the Arctic are usually three to five or six feet thick. Often it is much thicker. Three feet of ice will sustain anything when floating on water—not a brick building, of course, but any ordinary means of transport.

The people are Eskimos and speak their own language, which is a clucking-sounding speech. The Cape Prince of Wales Eskimos are Siberian Eskimos who have come over. But they are intermixed with the Alaskan natives. There is little difference in the two. The language differs a little, and the Siberians are not so mild in manners and character as the others. They live by fishing, mostly, and hunting and trading for the rest.

On the Alaskan side there has been a fine mission for many years. The first missionary, however, was murdered, but this was rather an accident. I was once angry at something that went wrong and swore, and a Cape Prince of Wales native looked at me with tender reproach in his eyes and said—

"Oh, pray, do not swear!"

The only route from Bellingham would be by vessel from Seattle, *via* Nome.



LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

UNCLAIMED MANUSCRIPTS

ATKINS, E. E. S., Jr.; Allen, Mable, Mrs.; Bayless, Dorothy; Banks, Jimmie; Bennett, Thomas T.; Brady, Patrick; Blum, M. A.; Buchanan, James; Breath, Hastlar Gal.; Crafts, H. A.; Chrisholm, Byron; Cardie, Sinn; Caney. Jack; Cuttriss, C. A.; Cortelli, Fatima; Crafts, L. S.; Colwell, L. Margaret Miss; Coxey, Willard; Dowson, Edward; Edwards, Henry A.; Emerson, F. S.; Exner, Donald W.; Edgar, Paul; Frandsen, R. M.; Ferguson, C. C.; Gilfillan, Ruth; Gaylord, Alfred; Gene, Frenchie; Gray, Laban; Happy, H.; Hungerford, G. E.; Hilees, Lieut. Wm.; Huntington, C. H.; Hurst, Freda; Holston, S. C.; Irvin, T. W.; King, J. D.; Kelly, D.; Kimsey, R. W.; King, Homer B.; Kahele, Edward Augustine; Kleipe, George Ralph; Lynch, W.; Livingston, J. K.; La Glaire, Peter; Loeck, A. J.; Loschik, S. T.; Marilee, Nelson; Matter, James K.; Mith, B. Radke; Moran, Edward J.; Mosse, James; MacIllrath, W. R.; Murphy, Elsbeth; Madison, Artell; McCravey, E. L.; Mennet, Geo.; Major, Max D.; Merritt, Florence; Morris, Troy; McGinsey, Fred; Moore, Earl; McCurdy, J. C.; Meade, Joseph H.; McBlair, Robert; Maus, Forrest L.; Noble, George; O'Farrel, Patrick; Ober, Bertha; Oangham, Rosebud Starr; Pierce, Samuel S.; Perry, James; Paterson, Robert G.; Paradis, A. B.; Patten, Lewis E.; Polowe, David; Presler, Phil.; Roe, Charles; Robinson, Jack P.; Robertson, Mrs. Chester; Rice, Alex.; Roland, Tom; Rhodes, Carrie L.; Ringer, Robert Derr; Rhodes, M. Benbow; Stillons, George; Schmidt, Alex. R.; Sprague, T. R.; Smalley, Jack G.; Singley, Anton; Saidmore, John C.; Seabury, Ralph; Todd, Homer Eps; Warner, J. E.; Weston, Edward; Wittell, Chester; Wilman, Cynthia; Webber, E. C.; Wetzel, Lewis.

STEWART, ROBERT. Last heard of in Mobile, Alabama in 1922. Sailor or painter by trade. Is about thirty-five years old; about five feet ten inches in height, blue eyes, light brown hair. Three-cornered scar on forehead, tatoo marks on both arms—butterfly, clasped hands, and sailing ship. His children need him. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Mrs. J. Stewart, 11 Garland Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

HOWE, FRANK A. Last seen August 8, 1922. Born at Plano, Ill., January 4, 1875. Blue eyes, dark hair streaked with gray, body long, legs rather short. Dagger with drops of blood and Co. L. 37 USV, Ill. Inft. 1898 tatooed on left fore arm. Aero and auto ignition expert and instructor by trade. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—Address Mrs. F. A. Howe, 805 West Pennsylvania Ave., San Diego, Calif.

CHALLIS, ANNA. Resident of Toronto, Canada. Formerly of Newburgh, Ont., Canada. Last heard from in the early '80's in Rochester, N. Y. Please write to Mrs. Charles Edwards, she has important news for you. Mother and father are both dead, also James.—Address Mrs. Edith Edwards, Chester Depot, Vermont.

LOOSLEY, EARLE. Engineer, U. S. Shipping Board Cargo Boat *Mojave*. In England 1919-1920, please write your friend of "Swiss Café & Joe's." Have information you will appreciate.—Address F. E. P., care of *Adventure.*

FARR, GOEBEL. "Come back. The babies and I need you."—Address Mrs. W. G. Farr, 92 Fulton Ave., Meridian, Miss.

NEWTON, GEORGE, or his children. Last heard of in 1886 or 1887, in some small town near Peterborough, Ont., Canada, believed to be in Meridian. Left a wife and three children. Children were placed in homes in vicinity. Wife is now dead. A large estate awaits the above persons. Please communicate with their cousin.—Address Mrs. Charlotte Edwards, Chester Depot, Vermont.

SHARP, JOHN R. Was at Parris Island, S. C. from June, 1919 to June, 1923. Home in Kansas City, Mo. Had brother and sister living there or nearby. "Sharp," I wrote you care of your brother, but letter was returned. Got the address from M. G. C., Washington, D. C. Write, have lots of news.—Address Newt, Box 936, Richmond, Va.

JACKSON, JAMES BANGLE. Home at Cambridge, England. Age about sixty-five. Went to United States thirty-five years ago, thence to Australia. Supposed to be gold mining. Any information will be appreciated by his sister Fanny.—Address Mrs. Jackson, 9 Asquith Ave., Mount Dennis, Ont., Canada.

ALLAN, KARL. Fourteen years of age. "If you see this come home or write at once." Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write to his mother.—Mrs. Annie Allan, 1468 Church St., San Francisco, Calif.

NEWTON, LUCY CAROLINE. Last heard from in the '80's, in Camden, N. J. Her brother Richard who left home when a young man, his oldest grandchild would like to get in touch with some one who knew the family.—Address Mrs. Edith Edwards, Chester Depot, Vermont.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ROSE OR RUZICKA, CHARLIE. I saw him last in Baltimore, Md., in Sept., 1919, heard of him again in June, 1921, then on his way to Hawaii. Worked at carpentering, specializing in concrete form construction. His nephew would appreciate news of him.—Address J. S. Seymour, 1st Machine Gun Squadron, Fort Clark, Texas.

FRANZ (FRANK) FUTTAGE. Born in Germany. Lived in Berlin until about 1907. Went to Montreal, Canada, to take up farming. Married a Miss Winter in 1908. Any information would be greatly appreciated by his friend. —Alexander Christner, Mona Vale, via Manly, N. S. W. Australia.

WESLEY, R. Mother wants you to come home at once.—Address Lucile V. R.

REED, MRS. JACK E. "I must hear from you at once. What do you want me to do? Write and tell me everything." Any information will be appreciated by her husband.—Address Jack Reed, Lock Box No. 4, Herrin, Ill.

MOUSSIER, ALFRED ROY, of Los Angeles, Cal. Last heard of at the Navy Radio Station, El Cayey, P. R. in 1921; Hollywood, William Allen; formerly of Atlanta, Ga.; any member of Co. F. 7th Reg. U. S. N. Great Lakes from Christmas 1919 to Sept., 1920; or any member of the Radio Gang U. S. S. *Prometheus* during the South American cruise in Spring of 1921, please communicate with their old shipmate.—W. L. H., care of *Adventure.*

R. D. S. If you will return at once, difficulties can be adjusted. Edgar advises return. Worried. Write. "CHICK."

THE following have been inquired for in either the Dec. 10 or Dec. 20 issue of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

ALLISON, MARY; Andersen, Louis; Anderson, Thomas A.; Arcand, D.; Berry, Lee; Boggs, Jack J.; Brockman, C. A.; Brotherton, George Henry; Caine, Austin; Cunningham, R.; Collins, Chas. or Mack; Dealey, Daniel T.; Fanning, Denitt; Fellows, J. H. or Jay; Forsythe, Davis Henry; Geibel, J. K.; Grass, Chas.; Gross, Joseph Leo; Hay, Edward William C.; Holmes, Elmer; Johnson, J. E.; Karelle, Lieut. L. B. U. S. N.; Kay, Thomas Macalpine; LaPar, Jean; Melin, Pete; Merton, Ed.; Mockley, J. E.; Morrison, Mrs. Edith; Neilsen, Seibert; Odell, Wm. E.; Prince, Geo. X.; Ragsdale, T. P.; Reilly, Fred W.; Shannon, Carmody or Fennell; Styring, Howard A.; Swenson, Rosie; Tainton, Blain A.; Wanless, R. B.; Williams, Charles H.

MISCELLANEOUS—Billy Boy; Bjelke; C. F. E.; Joe; R. D. S.; W. A. S.; Would like to hear from any one of the boys who were in Co. D., 9th Inf., Second Division.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JANUARY 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial,** the **complete novel** and the **complete novelette** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

GUN-SHY Shooting poachers with a camera.	***James Parker Long***
SISSIE No man could hurt *Chief* and get away with it.	***Obe Robertson***
THE MACBANE IS DEAD The scion of an old line goes west.	***Fred Halsey***
MANNIKIN TALK It whispered many secrets to *Adour*.	***William Byron Mowery***
DRY STICK An Indian has his own idea of justice.	***Alanson Skinner***
THE ALTAR OF THE LEGION Conclusion Earth, sea and Saxons beset Bellerium.	***Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur***

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Hugh Pendexter, Leonard H. Nason, Frederick Moore, L. Patrick Greene, J. Allan Dunn, Sidney Herschell Small, Talbot Mundy, James Parker Eldredge, Georges Surdez and Douglas Oliver; and short stories by Barry Scobee, Michael J. Phillips, John Webb, E. S. Pladwell, H. C. Montee, Charles Victor Fischer, Clyde B. Hough, E. O. Foster, Alanson Skinner, Edward Speyer, Thomas Topham, G. W. Barrington, Don Waters, and David Thibault; stories of bush lopers in the border colonies, white traders in the South Seas, wild Indians off the reservation, mounted policemen in Africa, buccaneers in the Caribbean, submarine chasers on the Western Ocean, ancient Romans in the British Isles, French troopers in the Sudan, adventurers the world around.